

F E B R U A R Y 2 0 2 1

**MONTHLY UPDATES ON
CURRENT AFFAIRS**

WILEY

NATIONAL

- © The Director-General of World Health Organisation (WHO), **Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus**, lauded India and the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, for sharing the Covid-19 vaccines and supporting the **Vaccine Equality** across the world.

He also showed the hope that other countries will follow the same path to distribute the vaccines equally.

- © The President of India, **Ram Nath Kovind**, has inaugurated the world's largest Stadium at Motera in Gujarat on February 24, 2021. This stadium is renamed the Narendra Modi Stadium.



It surpassed the Melbourne Cricket Ground and became the largest stadium in the world. It also made history by hosting the second home pink-ball test match on February 24 between India and England.

- © The world's leading dictionary publisher, Oxford Languages, has named **Aatmanirbharta** (which means self-reliance) as the Hindi word of the year 2020. The word was chosen as it 'validated the day-to-day achievements of the countless Indians who dealt with and survived the perils of a pandemic'. The Oxford Hindi word of the year is a word or expression chosen to reflect the ethos, mood, or preoccupations of the passing year and have endless potential as a term of cultural significance.
- © **World Unani Day** is observed every year on 11th February, started from 2017. World Unani Day's main objective is to spread awareness

about health care delivery through the Unani system of medicine through its preventive and curative philosophy. Every year, this day is celebrated to mark the birth anniversary of great Unani scholar and social reformer Hakim Ajmal Khan, a versatile genius, a great scholar, a social reformer, and a noted freedom fighter Unani medical educationist and founder of Scientific Research in Unani System of Medicine.

- © The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs has launched the **Pilot Pey Jal Survekshan** under Jal Jeevan Mission- Urban. The Pilot Pey Jal Survekshan has been launched in 10 cities: Agra, Badlapur, Bhubaneswar, Churu, Kochi, Madurai, Patiala Rohtak, Surat and Tumkur. The motive of the Jal Jeevan Mission Urban is to provide universal coverage of water supply to all households through functional taps in all 4,378 statutory towns in accordance with Sustainable Development Goal – 6.

ECONOMY

- © The Union Finance Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman, presented the **Union Budget 2021** for the 3rd time in a row. The main highlights of the budget 2021 are:

Health and Sanitation:

- A new scheme, titled PM Atma Nirbhar Swasthya Bharat Yojana, to be launched to develop primary, secondary and tertiary healthcare.
- Mission POSHAN 2.0 to improve nutritional outcomes across 112 aspirational districts.
- Operationalisation of 17 new public health units at points of entry.
- Modernisation of existing health units at 32 airports, 15 seaports, and land ports.
- Jal Jeevan Mission Urban aimed at better water supply nationwide.
- Strengthening of Urban Swachh Bharat Mission.

Education

- 100 new Sainik Schools to be set up.
- 750 Eklavya schools to be set up in tribal areas.
- A Central University to come up in Ladakh.

Infrastructure

- Vehicle scrapping policy to phase out old and unfit vehicles – all vehicles to undergo fitness tests in automated fitness centres every 20 years (personal vehicles), every 15 years (commercial vehicles).
- Highway and road work announced in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Assam.
- National Asset Monetising Pipeline launched to monitor asset monetisation process.
- National Rail Plan created to bring a future-ready Railway system by 2030.
- 100% electrification of Railways to be completed by 2023.
- Metro services announced in 27 cities, plus additional allocations for Kochi Metro, Chennai Metro Phase 2, Bengaluru Metro Phase 2A and B, Nashik and Nagpur Metros.
- National Hydrogen Mission to be launched to generate hydrogen from green power sources.
- Recycling capacity of ports to be doubled by 2024.
- Gas pipeline project to be set up in Jammu and Kashmir.
- Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (LPG scheme) to be extended to cover 1 crore more beneficiaries.

Tax

- No IT filing for people above 75 years who get pension and earn interest from deposits.
- The reopening window for IT assessment cases was reduced from 6 to 3 years. However, in case of serious tax evasion cases (Rs. 50 lakh or more), it can go up to 10 years.
- Affordable housing projects to get a tax holiday for one year.
- Compliance burden of small trusts whose annual receipts do not exceed Rs. 5 crores to be eased.
- The duty of copper scrap was reduced to 2.5%.
- Customs duty on gold and silver to be rationalised.
- Duty on naphtha reduced to 2.5%.
- Duty on solar inverters raised from 5% to 20%, and on solar lanterns from 5% to 15%.
- All nylon products are charged with a 5% customs duty.

- Tunnel boring machines to attract customs duty of 7%.
- Customs duty on cotton raised from 0 to 10%.
- Agriculture infrastructure and development cess proposed on certain items including urea, apples, crude soybean and sunflower oil, crude palm oil, Kabuli chana and peas.

Economy and Finance

- The fiscal deficit stands at 9.5% of the GDP, estimated to be 6.8% in 2021-22.
- Proposal to allow States to raise borrowings to 4% of GSDP this year.
- A Unified Securities Market Code to be created, consolidating provisions of the Sebi Act, Depositories Act, and two other laws.
- Proposal to increase FDI limit from 49% to 74%.
- An asset reconstruction company will be set up to take over stressed loans.
- Deposit insurance increased from ₹ 1 lakh to ₹ 5 lakh for bank depositors.
- Proposal to decriminalise the Limited Liability Partnership Act of 2008.
- Two PSU banks and one general insurance firm to be disinvested this year.
- An IPO of LIC to debut this fiscal year.
- Strategic sale of BPCL, IDBI Bank, Air India to be completed.

Agriculture

- Agriculture infrastructure fund to be made available for APMCs for augmenting their infrastructure.
- 1,000 more Mandis to be integrated into the E-NAM marketplace.
- Five major fishing hubs, including Chennai, Kochi, and Paradip are to be developed.
- A multipurpose seaweed park to be established in Tamil Nadu.

Employment

- A portal to be launched to maintain information on gig workers and construction workers.
- Social security to be extended to gig and platform workers.
- Margin capital required for loans via the Stand-up India scheme reduced from 25% to 15% for SCs, STs, and women.



- ⊙ The Finance Minister **Nirmala Sitharaman** had announced the privatisation of PSBs, while presenting Union Budget 2021–22. The government will bring about amendments in the two acts in order to facilitate the privatisation of public sector banks (PSBs). Amendments will be made in the Banking Companies (Acquisition and Transfer of Undertakings) Act, 1970 and Banking Companies (Acquisition and Transfer of Undertakings) Act, 1980. Now, in order to privatise the PSU Banks, provisions of these acts have to be changed. PSBs will be privatised as a disinvestment drive in order to generate Rs 1.75 lakh crore. Three banks including the IDBI banks will be privatised as per the announcement.
- ⊙ The finance ministry has allowed all the private sector banks to participate in business related to the government such as small savings schemes and collection of taxes and pension payments. Currently, only some of the big private sectors are allowed to conduct government-related businesses. It will also simulate the higher efficiency in standards of customer services.
- ⊙ The Ministry of consumer affairs had decided to integrate the Common Service Centres (CSCs) with the **E-Daakhil** portal to facilitate the consumers for e-filing. This online grievance redressal portal is now operational in 15 States and Union Territories. It empowers the consumer and their advocates to file consumer complaints online. It was developed under the Consumer Protection Act, 2019.
- ⊙ The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (IRDAI) has launched a standard personal accident cover called **Saral Suraksha Bima**. This accident cover will be mandatorily offered by the general and health insurers from April 1, 2021. This product has an assured maximum sum of Rs. 1 crore while the minimum assured sum of ₹ 2.5 lakh. Beyond this specified range, insurers are free to offer the sum assured on their own. For such sum assured, the same name can be given if all terms and conditions are same.
- ⊙ The Insurance sector regulator Insurance Regulatory Authority of India (IRDAI) has advised all Insurance companies to issue digital insurance policies using the government's **Digilocker** app. Issuance of the policies through the Digilocker app will result in a better customer experience.
- ⊙ The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has brought the State Bank of Sikkim under its regulation. The state of Sikkim was made an associate state and then given the status of a state at a later stage. It was made a part of India following a referendum in 1973. Thus, this state enjoys a special status under article 371F. Following this, Banking Regulation Act 1949 and Companies Act does not extend to Sikkim.
- ⊙ The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has successfully achieved 100 percent cashless toll collection at the National Highway fee plazas in the entire country. All lanes across the fee plazas on National Highways have been declared as FASTag lanes in effect from February 16, 2021. The roll-out of 100 percent cashless tolling is being positively received by the Highway users. Ever since the FASTag norm was notified, over two lakh 50 thousand tags have been sold.
- ⊙ The Reserve Bank of India has approved the takeover of **Dewan Housing Finance Corporation Ltd (DHFL)** by Piramal Group. This decision was taken by RBI after a month a Committee of Creditors of DHFL voted in favor of Piramal's bid. Following this, the resolution plan of the company has been approved by the RBI.
- ⊙ According to RBI, the licence of Maharashtra-based Shivam Sahakari Bank has been cancelled as it does not have adequate capital and earning prospects. The Commissioner for Cooperation and Registrar of Cooperative Societies, Maharashtra has also been requested to issue an order for winding up the bank and appoint a liquidator for the bank. With the cancellation of the licence the process of paying the depositors as per the DICGC Act, 1961 will be set in motion.
- ⊙ Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has announced that it will purchase four government securities (G-Secs) that amount to ₹20,000 crores. The central bank will purchase it on February 10, 2021, under the open market operations (OMOs). This move was announced in aftermath of the yields that were moving up to touch the intra-day high of 6.1634 per cent recently. The RBI was concerned about the higher government borrowing.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

- ③ The United States space agency, NASA, released the first audio from Mars on February 22, 2021. It was a faint crackling recording of the wind that was captured by the Perseverance rover. NASA has also released the first video of landing of the rover. The rover is on a mission to search if there is any sign of past life on the Mars.
- ③ The National Informatics Centre (NIC) has launched an app called **Sandes**. This instant messaging platform is similar to WhatsApp. It can be used for any type of communication by anyone. It requires a mobile number or an email id to get registered with the app. The need to launch the app was felt to ensure secure communication between the employees because the “Work from Home” culture has gained momentum in the backdrop of nationwide lockdown that was imposed in March 2020 amid the spread of Covid-19.

SPORTS

- ③ Japan’s tennis player **Naomi Osaka** won her fourth Grand Slam title after she beat American Jennifer Brady in the women’s singles game of the Australian Open final 2021.



The four Grand Slam title for Osaka comes two Australian Open titles (2021 and 2019) and two US Open title (2018 and 2020).

The list of winners of the Australian Open 2021 is as follows.

Title	Winner
Men’s Singles	Novak Djokovic (Serbia) defeated Daniil Medvedev (Russia)
Women’s Singles	Naomi Osaka (Japan) defeated Jennifer Brady (US)
Men’s Doubles	Ivan Dodig of Croatia and Filip Polášek (Slovakia) defeated Rajeev Ram (US) and Joe Salisbury (UK)
Women’s Doubles	Elise Mertens (Belgium) and Aryna Sabalenka (Belarus) defeated Barbora Krejčíková (Czech Republic) and Kateřina Siniaková (Czech Republic)
Mixed Doubles	Barbora Krejčíková (Czech Republic) and Rajeev Ram of the US defeated the Australian pair of Samantha Stosur and Matthew Ebden

- ③ The Union Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports has restored the recognition of Gymnastics Federation of India (GFI) as the National Sports Federation (NSF) with immediate effect till December 31, 2021. GFI will also be required to make a categorical affirmation regarding the provisions of Sports Code in its constitution within 6 months in order to bring it in line with the Sports Code.
- ③ The second edition of the **Khelo India Winter Games** began at Gulmarg in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir on February 26, 2021. This is a five-day event and will conclude on March 2, 2021. It will observe the participation of athletes from across India. It officially kick-started in the Ski resort of Gulmarg in the Baramulla district of north Kashmir which virtually inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It included the sports activities such as ice-skating, shoe race, skiing, ice-hockey, Nordic ski, snowboarding, ice stock and ski mountaineering.
- ③ The chief minister of Karnataka, BS Yeddyurappa, announced that Karnataka will be hosting the second **Khelo India University Games (KIUG)** in the year 2021 which will be inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. These games will be held in the Jain University and other venues of the state. Jain University will organise the games in collaboration with the Association of Indian Universities.



- © Indian table tennis player, **Manika Batra** has won the 82nd Senior National Table Tennis Championship. She beaten Reeth Rishya by 8-11, 10-12, 11-1, 11-9, 11-5, 11-6 at the Tau Devi Lal Sports Complex in Panchkula.



Also, she competed at two WTT Contender events which started on February 28 and followed by the World Olympic qualifiers and Asian Olympic qualifiers in Doha which is scheduled for March 14 and 18, respectively.

PERSONS IN NEWS

- © Bhim Army Chief **Chandra Shekhar Aazad** and five Indian-origin personalities have been featured in the 2021 TIME100 Next.



TIME100 Next 2021 is the second edition of the annual list of Time magazine's 100 '**emerging leaders who are shaping the future**'. Bhim Army is a Dalit rights organisation based in Uttar Pradesh to help Dalits escape poverty through education. It was founded by Satish Kumar, Vijay Ratan Singh and Chandrashekhar Azad in 2015.

The five Indian-origin persons in Time100 Next list are

- Twitter lawyer: Vijaya Gadde
- UK's Finance Minister: Rishi Sunak
- Instacart founder and CEO: Apoorva Mehta
- Get Us PPE executive director and doctor: Shikha Gupta
- Founder of nonprofit Upsolve's: Rohan Pavuluri

- © A space supply ship, Cygnus NG-15 cargo dubbed as **S.S. Katherine Johnson** has been named in honour of Katherine Johnson, a Black NASA mathematician, who played a critical role in the success of the first U.S. crewed spaceflight, Mercury-Atlas 6 Mission.



The S.S. Katherine Johnson arrived on February 22, 2021, and will be at the International Space Station until May 2021.

- © Indian-American **Bhavya Lal** was appointed by NASA as the Acting Chief of Staff of the US space agency. She served as a member of the Biden Presidential Transition Agency Review Team for the agency and oversaw the agency's transition under the administration of President Joe Biden.



She has extensive experience in engineering and space technology, serving as a member of the research staff at the Institute for Defence



Analyses Science and Technology Policy Institute (STPI) from 2005 to 2020.

- ③ The United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) has appointed **Preeti Sinha** as its Executive Secretary. She is an Indian-origin investment and development banker. She will oversee the organisation's efforts in delivering the scalable impact to make the international financial environment work for the frontier and pre-frontier markets of the world. After she was appointed, she highlighted that her goal would be to make 'C' in UNCDF (capital).
- ③ The Nigerian economist **Ngozi Okonjo Iweala** has been appointed as the head of the World Trade Organization and became the first woman to take this position.



She has also become the first African to hold this charge amid rising protectionism. Okonjo-Iweala was named as the director-general by the representatives of the 164 member countries of WTO.

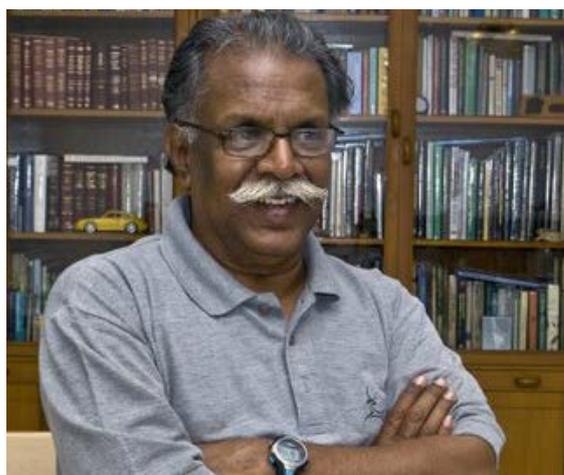
PLANS AND POLICIES

- ③ Madhya Pradesh Cabinet has approved the "**Penal Law (Madhya Pradesh Amendment) Bill, 2021**" to give life imprisonment to food adulterers in states. In December 2019, an awareness rally organised in Bhopal to fight against adulteration. The rally witnessed the participation of people from all age groups. It was held from Roshanpura to Lal Parade in Bhopal.
- ③ Karnataka's Chief Minister **B.S. Yediyurappa** launched the **Namma Cargo** services on February 26, 2021 at Vidhana Soudha. The State road transport corporations will transport the parcels to generate more revenue, except for the Bangalore Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC). The Cargo services will be implemented

across 109 bus stations in Karnataka. It will also be implemented across the selected locations in Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Telangana, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. The Transport Department has also aimed to expand the service in order to provide home deliveries.

AWARDS AND HONOURS

- ③ The **78th Golden Globe Awards** ceremony recently took place in a virtual as well as in offline format on February 28, 2021. The award ceremony was filmed from Los Angeles and New York City and was co-hosted by Amy Poehler and Tina Fey, consequently for the fourth time. All the winning stars accepted their awards in the virtual mode. They also delivered their acceptance speeches virtually. This year Netflix had received the most nominations with a total count at 42. Out of these, 22 nominations were in film categories, including the Best Picture (Drama) nominations. The Netflix film called "Mank" and "The Trial of the Chicago 7" were nominated for the Best Picture (Drama) Nominations. 20 Netflix shows were nominated in the Television categories dominated by the show like "The Crown" and "Schitt's Creek."
- ③ **S. Theodore Baskaran** has won the Sanctuary Lifetime Service Award, 2020. He is a writer, historian, naturalist and activist. This award was instituted by the Sanctuary Nature Foundation.



He was chosen for the award in light of his dedication to wildlife conservation. He won the award for his writing prowess in English and Tamil, contributing to the conservation discourse and inspiring the young naturalists.