

Daily News Decode

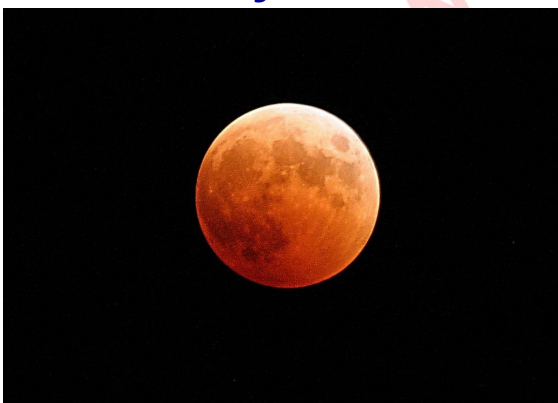
26.05.21

Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA)



- PFRDA is the statutory authority established by an enactment of the Parliament, to regulate, promote and ensure orderly growth of the National Pension System (NPS) and pension schemes to which this Act applies.
- NPS was initially notified for central government employees recruits w.e.f.
- 1st January 2004 and subsequently adopted by almost all State Governments for its employees
- NPS was extended to all Indian citizens (resident/non-resident/overseas) on a voluntary basis and to corporates for its employees.
- The Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) here today announced crossing the milestone of Rs 6 lakh crore (Rs 6 trillion) of Assets Under Management (AUM) under the National Pension System (NPS) and Atal Pension Yojana (APY), after 13 years.
- The AUM growth of last Rs 1 trillion has been achieved in just 7 months.

Partial phase of Lunar eclipse to be visible in India on Wednesday



- A partial phase of Lunar eclipse will be visible in India on Wednesday.
- According to the India Meteorological Department, IMD, a total eclipse of the Moon will occur on 26th May.
- It said, from India, just after moonrise, ending of the partial phase of the eclipse will be visible for a short span of time from north eastern parts of India except Sikkim, some parts of West Bengal, Odisha and Andaman and Nicobar Islands.
- The Science and Technology Ministry said, the eclipse will be visible in the region covering South America, North America, Asia, Australia, Antarctica, the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean.
- Lunar eclipse occurs on a full moon day when the Earth comes in between the Sun and the Moon and when all the three objects are aligned.
- The next lunar eclipse will be visible from India on 19th November this year.

SBI research: GDP likely grew by 1.3% in Q4 FY21



- India's GDP is likely to have grown at 1.3% in the fourth quarter of 2020-21 and may have contracted by about 7.3% for the full financial year, according to an SBI research report 'Ecowrap'.
- The National Statistical Office (NSO) will release the GDP estimates for the March 2021 quarter and provisional annual estimates for the year 2020-21 on May 31.
- State Bank of India (SBI) has developed a 'nowcasting model' with 41 high-frequency indicators associated with industry activity, service activity, and the global economy in collaboration with the State Bank Institute of Leadership (SBIL), Kolkata.
- The economics research team said that going by the estimate of 1.3% GDP growth, India would still be the fifth-fastest-growing country among 25 nations that have released their GDP numbers so far

Cabinet approves Opening of a new Consulate General of India in Maldives



- Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has approved the opening of a new Consulate General of India in Addu City, the Maldives in 2021.
- India and Maldives share ethnic, linguistic, cultural, religious and commercial links steeped in antiquity.
- Maldives occupies an important place in the 'Neighbourhood First Policy' and the 'SAGAR' (Security and Growth for All in the Region) vision of the Government of India.
- The opening of a Consulate General in Addu City will help augment India's diplomatic presence in the Maldives and make it commensurate with the existing and aspired level of engagement.
- The momentum and energy in the bilateral relationship have reached unprecedented levels under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi and President Solih.
- This is also a forward-looking step in pursuit of our national priority of growth and development or 'SabkaSaathSabka Vikas'.
- Augmentation of India's diplomatic presence will, inter-alia, provide market access for Indian companies and bolster Indian exports of goods and services.
- This would have a direct impact in augmenting domestic production and employment in line with our goal of a self-reliant India or 'Atmanirbhar Bharat'.

74th World Health Assembly



- The WHA74 will take place virtually from 24 May to 1 June 2021, in light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. You will be able follow proceedings on the webcast below.
- Theme: Ending this pandemic, preventing the next: building together a healthier, safer and fairer world.
- The World Health Assembly is the decision-making body of WHO.
- It is attended by delegations from all WHO Member States and focuses on a specific health agenda prepared by the Executive Board.
- The main functions of the World Health Assembly are to determine the policies of the Organization, appoint the Director-General, supervise financial policies, and review and approve the proposed programme budget.
- The Health Assembly is held annually in Geneva, Switzerland.

Vesak Day 2021 observed globally on 26 May



- Vesak Day 2021 is observed globally on 26 May.
- Vesak, the Day of Full Moon is the most sacred day to Buddhists all over the world.
- On this day, Lord Gautham Buddha attained enlightenment. The Day is commemorated by the United Nations every year.
- The Day is being celebrated by the United Nations since 2000.
- The resolution to celebrate the day was passed in 1999. Since 2004, International Vesak Summit is being organized. In 2019, it was held in Vietnam.
- So far, the summit has been held 11 times in Thailand, 3 times in Vietnam and 1 time in Sri Lanka.
- The decision to celebrate the birthday of Buddha as Vesak Day was first formalized at the World Fellowships of Buddhists conference that was held in Sri Lanka in 1950.
- The conference was attended by Buddhist leaders from several countries.

India-Israel signs 3-year program for Cooperation in Agriculture



- India and Israel have inked a three-year joint work programme which will continue till 2023.
- A joint work programme was initiated with the aim of enhancing cooperation in agriculture.
- Under the new work programme, 13 Centres of Excellence (CoEs) were set up to make Indian farmers aware of Israeli farm and water technologies.
- A model ecosystem in agriculture called Villages of Excellence (VoE) will also be created across eight states within 75 villages.
- The new programme will promote the increase in net income and enhance the livelihood of the individual farmer.
- India and Israel have completed four similar joint work programmes successfully.

David Barnea Appointed as Israel's Next Mossad Chief



- Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu appointed David Barnea as the new head of the country's spy agency, the Mossad.
- Barnea, a former longtime Mossad operative, will succeed Yossi Cohen as head of Israel's intelligence agency on June 1.
- Cohen has served as Israel's spymaster since taking office in 2016.
- Barnea, who is in his 50s, lives in the Sharon region north of Tel Aviv.
- He did his military service in the elite Sayeret Matkal special operations force. About 30 years ago, he enlisted in the Mossad, where he became a case officer

UDHAMPUR-SRINAGAR-BARAMULLA RAIL LINK PROJECT (USBRL)



- Minister for Railways reviewed the progress of Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail link Project (USBRL).
- Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail link Project (USBRL) having length of 272 Km long Railway Line from Udhampur to Baramulla joining the Kashmir valley with rest of the country and has been declared as National Project in 2002.

- Out of 272 Km of USBRL Project, work has been completed on 161 Km and commissioned.
- Completion date of the project is April-2023.

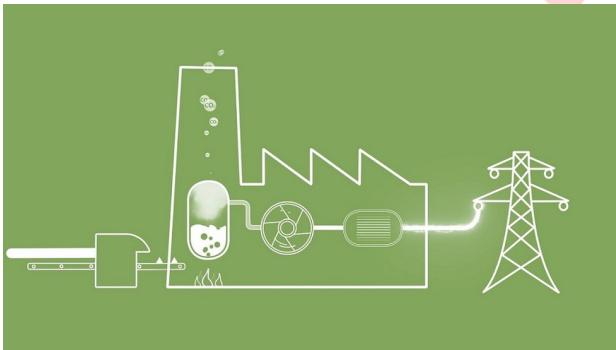
Status of work sub-divided under it is as under:

- Udhampur - Katra -25km (commissioned in July 2014)
- Quazigund - Baramulla – 118km (commissioned in Oct., 2009)
- Banihal - Quazigund – 18km (commissioned in June 2013)
- Katra to Banihal- 111km in progress (Target 2022-23)

Katra- Banihal Section of USBRL Project

- The work on intervening stretch of Katra-Banihal section (111 km) is in progress and this section predominantly involves tunnelling i.e. 97 Km out of 111 Km (i.e. 87%) of length of Katra-Banihal section is in tunnels and maximum length of tunnel T-49 is 12.75 Km.
- There are 27 Main tunnel and 37 Bridges.
- These bridges include the iconic Chenab Bridge which will be the highest railway bridge in the world. Arch Launching of Chenab bridge was completed on 05.04. 2021.
- Indian railway's first cable-stayed bridge is also being constructed on Anji Khad. Ancillary viaduct portion of Anji khad Bridge has been completed.

NATIONAL MISSION ON USE OF BIOMASS IN THERMAL POWER PLANTS



- Ministry of Power has decided to set up a National Mission on use of Biomass in coal based thermal power plants.
- To increase the level of co-firing from present 5% to higher levels to have a larger share of carbon neutral power generation from the thermal power plants.
- To take up R&D activity in boiler design to handle the higher amount of silica, alkalis in the biomass pellets.
- To facilitate overcoming the constraints in supply chain of bio mass pellets and agro-residue and its transport upto to the power plants.
- To consider regulatory issues in biomass co-firing.
- The Mission would have a Steering Committee headed by Secretary (Power) comprising of all stakeholders including representatives from Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas (MoPNG), Ministry of New & Renewable Energy (MNRE) etc.
- The Executive Committee would be headed by Member (Thermal), CEA.
- The duration of proposed National Mission would be a minimum 5 years.

Significance of the Proposed Mission

- It would address the issue of air pollution due to farm stubble burning and to reduce carbon footprints of thermal power generation.
- This would further support the energy transition in the country and our targets to move towards cleaner energy sources.
- It will also contribute in the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP).

NATIVE OR INDIGENOUS TREE SPECIES IN MUMBAI



- Over the past few days, Mumbai has witnessed a high number of tree-fall incidents due to Cyclone Tauktae, leading to suggestions that the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) should plant only indigenous species in the city.
- Native species should not be confused with old trees or trees that are widely present.
- Over at least three decades, the government has imported exotic species, and new tree species were planted across the city for beautification.
- For example, Gulmohar or Rain trees are widely found in Mumbai, however, they are not native species.
- By definition, a “native” plant is living, growing, and reproducing naturally in a particular region.
- The BMC has prepared a list of 41 native trees that can be planted in Mumbai and are part of the trees in the Konkan belt.
- These are Wad, Pimpal, Umber, Kanchan, Kadamba, Gunj, Palas, Nim, Mahogany, Moh, Bahawa, Sag, Arjun, Ain, Kinjal, Sita Ashok, Undal, Nagkeshar, Champa, Shivan, Shirish, Karanj, Bakul, Bell, Taman, Hirda, Behda, Coconut, Amla, Khair, Tetu, Mango, Putranjiva, Wild Almond, Bibba, Parijatak, Rita, Sandalwood, Phanas and Chafa.

Emergency Use Listing (EUL)



- Bharat Biotech International will hold a preliminary meeting with the World Health Organization (WHO) before applying for an emergency-use listing (EUL) for its covid vaccine, Covaxin.
- The World Health Organization (WHO) developed the Emergency Use Assessment and Listing (EUAL) mechanism in response to the 2014 – 2016 Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) outbreak.
- The EUAL is a risk-based procedure for assessing and listing unlicensed vaccines, therapeutics and in vitro diagnostics (IVDs) for use primarily during public health emergencies of international concern (PHEIC).

- Later the EUL procedure replaced the Emergency Use Assessment and Listing (EUAL) procedure.
- The EUL is a special procedure intended to provide a time-limited listing for unlicensed products in an emergency context when limited data are available and the products are not yet ready for application for prequalification.
- The manufacturer will complete the development of the product and submit for licensure and WHO prequalification.
- The EUL is not intended to interfere with ongoing clinical trials.
- Bharat Biotech officials, on 19 April, 2021 had submitted an expression of interest for EUL with WHO.
- After the company submits its final proposal for Covaxin's EUL, WHO's product evaluation group comprising regulatory experts from around the world and a technical advisory group will conduct a review.
- The process may include on-site inspections of the company's facilities.
- The company had recently issued a statement saying that the second interim data from its phase 3 trial of nearly 26,000 participants showed that the vaccine has an efficacy of 78% in preventing covid-19.
- This efficacy is partially lower than the 80.6% found in the first interim data in March, 2021.
- WHO's cutoff for efficacy of covid-19 vaccines is 50%, the same as the lower limit set by regulators in India, the US and other countries.
- A WHO EUL will make those inoculated with Covaxin eligible to enter regions such as the European Union.
- While WHO and European Medicines Agency (EMA) have authorized vaccines from Pfizer, Moderna, AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson, WHO has also included jabs from China's Sinopharm in its list.

Yellow fungus



- Yellow fungus is a fungal infection, which can be rather fatal and deadly as it begins internally unlike the others where symptoms are visible.
- This characteristic of yellow fungus makes it very difficult to manage and more dangerous as early diagnosis is a necessity in such cases.
- The infection is mainly caused by bad hygiene.
- Overuse of steroids, antibacterial medications or poor oxygen use are also a few causes of the infection.
- Symptoms of yellow fungus are disrupted digestion, lack of energy, lethargy and fatigue, loss of appetite, malnutrition, prolonging recovery timelines and weight loss.

- In later stages of the infection patients exhibit severe symptoms like sunken eyes due to malnutrition and organ failure, slow healing of wounds and oozing of pus from the wounds, and necrosis (cell injury that leads to death of cells and living tissues).
- The treatment for yellow fungus is Amphotericin-B injection

High levels of mercury found in rivers linked to Greenland Ice Sheet:



- According to recent research, high concentrations of mercury were found in the water bodies fed by the Greenland Ice Sheet.
- Typical dissolved mercury content in rivers is about 1 – 10 ng L⁻¹ (the equivalent of a salt grain-sized amount of mercury in an Olympic swimming pool of water).
- In the water bodies fed by the Greenland Ice Sheet, scientists found dissolved mercury levels in excess of 150 ng L⁻¹, far higher than an average river.

Thereasons behind the high concentration of mercury?

- It is not the industries or other anthropogenic activities, as is the case with most contaminants.
- Mercury-rich bedrock is weathered during the slow movement of glaciers down the slope of hills and the ground particles are carried into the streams as the glacier melts.
- Mercury is a naturally occurring element that is found in air, water and soil.
- Released into the atmosphere through natural processes such as weathering of rocks, volcanic eruptions, geothermal activities, forest fires, etc. Mercury is also released through human activities.
- Mercury may have toxic effects on the nervous, digestive and immune systems, and on lungs, kidneys, skin and eyes.
- Chemical of major public health concern- Mercury is considered by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as one of the top ten chemicals or groups of chemicals of major public health concern.

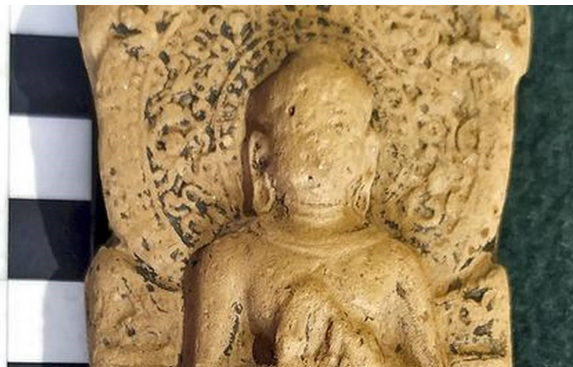
WHO BioHub initiative:



World Health
Organization

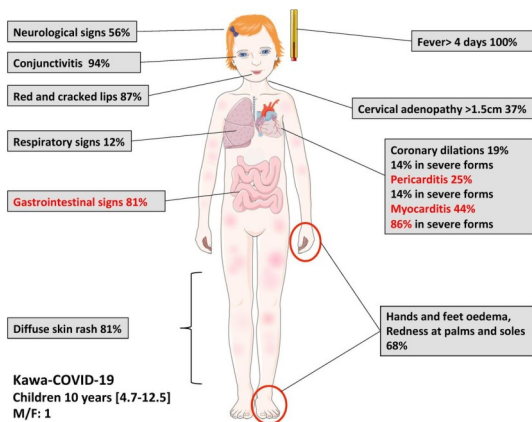
- BioHub will be a global facility for pathogen storage, sharing and analysis.
- Significance: The sharing of pathogens is currently done bilaterally between countries; WHO BioHub will expedite the process.
- WHO and Switzerland have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to launch this facility.
- Potential: The move is significant in the view of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the need to underline the importance of sharing pathogen information to assess risks and launch countermeasures.

Miniature sculpture of the Buddha found in Udupi:



- The Buddha was found among debris removed from an abandoned well at Alembi in Udupi district in Karnataka.
 - It is nine centimetres high, five centimetres wide and two centimetres thick.
 - The Buddha is seated on a lotus pedestal in Dharma Chakra Pravarthana Mudre.
 - Below the seat, six disciples are seated on either side of the Dharma Chakra.
- The Lord wears clothes and ear-rings.
 - A small Ushnisha is shown on the top of the head.
 - In the back of the head, a beautifully carved round lobe is seen.
 - On the top corners, two Yakshas and, on either side of his back, two winged horses have been carved out.
 - The sculpture is in the Gupta style.
 - Traditionally, the ancient Tulu Nadu was said to be ruled by the Kadambas of Banavasi.
 - The Guptas and the Kadambas of Banavasi had matrimonial relations. Hence, the discovery of the Buddha sculpture is not an uncommon thing.

Paediatric inflammatory multisystem syndrome (PIMS-TS):



- A small study has reported most symptoms of rare paediatric inflammatory multisystem syndrome (PIMS-TS) associated with SARS-CoV2 are resolved after six months.
- PIMS-TS, also known as multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children (MIS-C), is a rare condition associated with SARS-CoV-2 infection that was first defined in April 2020.
- Causes: It is not known what triggers the condition, but it is thought to be a rare immune overreaction that occurs approximately four to six weeks after mild or asymptomatic SARS-CoV-2 infection.
- Symptoms of the condition include fever, rash, eye infection, and gastrointestinal symptoms (e.g. diarrhoea, stomach-ache, nausea).
- In some rare cases, the condition can lead to multi-organ failure.

What is 'traceability' and why does WhatsApp oppose it?



- A WhatsApp blog says governments asking tech companies to find out who sent a message on private messaging services is called "traceability."
- It says "traceability breaks end-to-end encryption and severely undermines privacy" as "in order to trace one message, services would've to trace every message."
- However, Indian government said traceability will be needed only in cases of "unlawful" content.

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