

EVERYDAY CURRENT AFFAIRS – MAY 17, 2019

TAMIL NADU

- ◆ **The Vellore Institute of Technology (VIT) - has been conferred the best University in India for Internationalization of Higher Education by UNICA**



- ✓ UNICA is a network of 51 universities from 37 capital cities of Europe, with its headquarters at Brussels, Belgium
- ✓ UNICA facilitates international collaboration and promoting academic leadership through understanding and sharing between its members throughout the European higher education area.

NATIONAL

- ◆ **'Vande Bharat Express' - completed 1 lakh running kilometres without missing a single trip on May 16, 2019**



- ✓ Also known as 'Train 18', India's first engineless train was flagged off on February 15, 2019 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during its run from New Delhi to Varanasi
- ✓ It is India's first semi-high speed train (running at speed of 160 kmph) equipped with world class passenger amenities
- ✓ It has been manufactured by the Integral Coach Factory (ICF) in the period of 18 months under the 'Make in India' initiative of the Government

- ✓ The Train was officially rolled out on October 29, 2018 by Railway Board Chairman Ashwani Lohani at the Chennai's Integral Coach Factory
- ✓ Train 18 is regarded as a successor to the Shatabdi Express, introduced in 1988
- ✓ It reduces travel time between New Delhi and Varanasi by 15% compared to the Shatabdi Express.
- ✓ It has 16 fully air-conditioned coaches with Chair Car type configuration, equipped with CCTV cameras

◆ **The official website of Lokpal – was inaugurated by Justice Pinaki Chandra Ghose, the Chairperson of the Lokpal, on May 16, 2019**



- ✓ The Website can be accessed at <http://lokpal.gov.in>.
- ✓ The Website has been developed by National Informatics Centre (NIC)
- ✓ It provides the basic information with respect to the working and functioning of the Lokpal
- ✓ India got its first Lokpal on March 19, 2019 with the appointment of Justice Pinaki Chandra Ghose as the Chairperson of Lokpal
- ✓ Ghose is currently also serving as a Member of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)
- ✓ The Lokpal has four Judicial and four non-Judicial Members

Judicial Members	Non-Judicial Members
Dilip B. Bhosale (Former Chief Justice)	Archana Ramasundaram (First woman Chief of Sashastra Seema Bal)
Pradip Kumar Mohanty (Former Chief Justice)	Dinesh Kumar Jain (Former Maharashtra Chief Secretary)
Abhilasha Kumari (Former Chief Justice)	Mahender Singh (Former IRS officer)
Ajay Kumar Tripathi (sitting Chief Justice of Chhattisgarh)	Indrajeet Prasad Gautam (Former IAS officer)

- ✓ The Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013 calls for setting up Lokpal at the centre and Lokayuktas at the State level
- ✓ The Lokpal is appointed by a high-level selection committee headed by Prime Minister and consisting of Lok Sabha Speaker, Leader of Opposition Party (LoP), Chief Justice of India and an eminent jurist, Mukul Rohatgi

◆ **The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act - is set to be withdrawn from Assam in August**

- ✓ The Centre has asked the Army to plan its return from Assam 29 years after it was imposed first
- ✓ In 1990, the state was declared a “disturbed area” over Ulfa militancy and AFPSA was imposed

◆ **National Mission for Clean Ganga - has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with HCL Foundation and INTACH to plant 10,000 Rudraksh trees in the Ganga Basin area in Uttarakhand**

- ✓ It is a CSR initiative under Namami Gange Programme
- ✓ This project will also address the issue of unemployment as locals will get work in this project
- ✓ Elaeocarpus ganitrus or Rudraksh Tree is a large evergreen tree with broad-leaves
- ✓ Its seed is traditionally used for prayer beads in Hinduism and Buddhism.
- ✓ E. Ganitrus is most popular species which is used in the making of organic jewellery or mala
- ✓ Rudraksh tree develops the fruit in three to four years.
- ✓ It is mainly found in Gangetic plain, foothills of Himalayas, Nepal, Indonesia etc.
- ✓ Namami Gange, is an Integrated Conservation Mission, approved as ‘Flagship Programme’ by the Union Government in June 2014 with budget outlay of Rs.20,000 Crore

◆ **The Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO) - has invited India to be an observer in the CTBT meetings**

- ✓ As part of the invitation, India will get rights to data from the International Monitoring System - IMS, also to a network that includes 337 facilities (321 monitoring stations and 16 radionuclide labs) located in 89 countries
- ✓ This is an advance system that can be detected even small nuclear explosions using seismology, hydro-acoustics, infrasound and radionuclide technology
- ✓ The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) is an international treaty that is banning all nuclear explosions
- ✓ The Treaty was negotiated at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva and adopted by the United Nations General Assembly.
- ✓ It opened for signature on 24 September 1996.
- ✓ Since then 182 countries have signed the Treaty, with Trinidad and Tobago being the last signatory on October 8, 2009
- ✓ So far, 154 countries have ratified the Treaty – most recently Ghana on 14 June 2011.
- ✓ CTBT curbs the development of new nuclear weapons and the improvement of existing nuclear weapon designs

INTERNATIONAL

◆ **US President, Trump – unveils new ‘point-based’ Green card system, drastically reducing the ‘family-based’ system**

- ✓ The new proposal will increase skills-based green cards to 57% from the existing 12%
- ✓ As of now, about 66% of the Green Cards are given to those with family ties
- ✓ Points will be awarded to applicants based on their education, work experience, age (more points for younger workers), and English language ability
- ✓ New immigrants will have to show that they can financially support themselves and will need to pass a civics exam.
- ✓ People given green cards on humanitarian and diversity grounds will now only constitute 10% of all green card recipients
- ✓ Notably, America's last immigration overhaul was 54 years ago
- ✓ The study of the immigration systems of other nations revealed that 12% of migration to the United States was based on skill and employment, while it was 63% in Canada, 57% in New Zealand, 68% in Australia and 52% in Japan

◆ **US President, Trump – declares national Emergency in US to protect US networks from espionage**

- ✓ The move is apparently aimed at banning equipment from Chinese telecommunications giant Huawei from U.S. networks.
- ✓ The national emergency empowers the government to ban the technology and services of "foreign adversaries" deemed to pose "unacceptable risks" to national security — including from cyber-espionage and sabotage.
- ✓ It has given the Department of Commerce 150 days to come up with regulations.
- ✓ Huawei, the world's biggest supplier of network gear, has been deemed a danger in U.S. national security circles
- ✓ U.S. justice and intelligence officials say Chinese economic espionage and trade secret theft are rampant.
- ✓ Huawei vehemently denies involvement in Chinese spying
- ✓ Huawei's handsets are virtually nonexistent in the U.S., with only about 2% of telecom equipment purchased by North American carriers was Huawei-made in 2017.

◆ **Austria - approved a new law, banning headscarf in primary schools**

- ✓ The law was proposed by the ruling right-wing government.
- ✓ Under the law, any ideological or religiously influenced clothing, which is associated with the covering of the head, will be banned
- ✓ Austria previously had introduced a ban on full-face covering in 2017 as a part of its integration policy

- ✓ Globally, Denmark had enacted a similar ban on wearing of face veils in public in 2018
- ✓ Other European Union nations such as France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Bulgaria and the German state of Bavaria, have all imposed a ban on the wearing of face veils in public
- ✓ Sri Lanka also announced a ban on covering of the face with burqa, veil or in any manner that prevents identification of the person in late April 2019

◆ **Alabama's Senate – has approved the most stringent abortion law of the United States The new law would make performing an abortion at any stage of pregnancy a crime punishable by up to 99 years or life in prison.**

- ✓ The bill only provides an exception in cases where the mother's health is at serious risk

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

◆ **The Soviet inter-planetary station, Venus-5, made a soft-landing on Venus on May 16**

- ✓ Venus-5 took 130 days to cover the 350 million kilometres to the planet
- ✓ Another space station, Venus-6, launched five days after Venus-5, was approaching the planet and would enter its atmosphere on May 18
- ✓ Venus-5 was launched on January 5 this year while Venus-6 took off on January 10
- ✓ The two spacecraft are following up the mission of Venus-4, which made history in October, 1967, by parachuting through Venus's atmosphere and transmitting 90 minutes of data back to earth

◆ **Researchers from the United States Department of Energy (DOE) - have created 100% recyclable plastic at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory**

- ✓ Scientists named it poly diketoenamine, or PDK plastic.
- ✓ It looks like a Lego Playset and it can be disassembled into various parts even at molecular level
- ✓ This plastic can be recycled into any colour, form or shape without losing its original quality.
- ✓ Unlike conventional plastics, the monomers of PDK plastic could be recovered and freed from any compounded additives simply by dipping the material in a highly acidic solution
- ✓ Most of the plastic products are made of large molecules called polymers
- ✓ It is composed of various units of small carbon compounds named monomers.

DEFENCE

◆ **The warships from the United States, France, Japan and Australia - conducted their first-ever combined naval exercise in Asia on May 16, 2019**

- ✓ The move could be aimed at undermining China's growing power in the region.
- ✓ The United States was represented by its guided-missile destroyer, USS William P Lawrence, while France was represented by its aircraft carrier, FS Charles de Gaulle and its escorts

ECONOMY

◆ **The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) - released 'Payment and Settlement Systems in India: Vision 2019 - 2021', a vision document for safe, secure, quick and affordable e-payment system on May 15, 2019**

- ✓ The core theme of the vision document is 'Empowering Exceptional (E)payment Experience'
- ✓ The Government is expecting that the number of digital transactions is expected to increase over four times to 8707 crore by December 2021
- ✓ The document deliberates on boosting customer awareness, setting up a 24X7 helpline and self-regulatory organisation for e-payment service providers.
- ✓ The Payment Systems Vision 2021 states 36 specific action points and 12 specific outcomes
- ✓ The vision document aims to achieve "a 'highly digital' and 'cash-lite' society through Goal Posts (4Cs) - Competition, Cost effectiveness, Convenience and Confidence
- ✓ The previous Vision document covered the period 2016-2018

AWARDS

◆ **The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) - conferred Dr Pramod Kumar Mishra, Additional Principal Secretary to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the 'Sasakawa Award 2019 for Disaster Risk Reduction'**



- ✓ The award was announced during the 6th Session of 'Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction' (GPDRR) 2019, which is being held at Geneva, Switzerland
- ✓ The theme of the Sasakawa Award 2019 was 'Building Inclusive and Resilient Societies'
- ✓ Under this theme, the UNDRR received over 60 nominations from over 30 countries.
- ✓ Bijal Brahmhatt, Director of the Mahila Housing SEWA Trust of India and Sidnei Furtado, Director of Department of Civil Defence, Campinas, Brazil were the other winners of 2019 Sasakawa Award
- ✓ Instituted 30 years ago, The Sasakawa Award is the most prestigious award of the United Nations in the area of Disaster Risk Management
- ✓ It is jointly organised by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) and the Nippon Foundation
- ✓ The Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction is a multi-stakeholder forum held annually to deliberate on the implementation of disaster risk reduction strategies and agreements namely 2005 Hyogo Framework for Action and Sendai Framework
- ✓ The first session was held in the year 2007

◆ **Kitkit School from the U.S. and onebillion from the U.K. - were declared co-winners of the XPRIZE for global learning, an award for creating programmes to train children how to teach themselves to read**



- ✓ A team from Bengaluru was among the five finalists.
- ✓ Nearly 200 teams from 40 countries entered the competition
- ✓ The goal was to develop open-sourced software, put it on tablets donated by Google and have thousands of children in 170 remote villages in Tanzania test it
- ✓ The five finalists, which also included teams from New York, Pittsburgh and Bengaluru, spent 15 months refining the software.
- ✓ They had to develop programmes filled with games that could grab children's attention and then use drawings, letters, numbers and sounds to teach themselves to read, write and do arithmetic
- ✓ Chimple team from Bengaluru created a learning platform aimed at encouraging children to learn reading, writing and mathematics on a tablet through more than 60 games and 70 stories

REPORT

◆ India - had more Under 5 Child deaths in 2015 than any other nation, as per a study published in healthcare journal, The Lancet Global Health

- ✓ In the years from 2000 to 2015, India made great progress in reducing under-five mortality from 2.5 million in 2000 to 1.2 million in 2015.
- ✓ Goa recorded 9.7 under-five deaths per 1,000 births as compared to Assam's 73.1.
- ✓ Astonishingly this disparity between north and south India has increased from a ratio of 1.4 in 2000 to 2.1 in 2015.
- ✓ 57.9% of deaths among Indian children under five in 2015 occurred in the first four weeks of life – the neonatal period.
- ✓ The leading cause of death for children under five was preterm birth complications, which accounted for 27.5% of the mortality total.
- ✓ Second on the list was pneumonia, accounting for 15.9% of deaths.
- ✓ Infectious illnesses were more often among the top causes in the poorer, high-mortality states.
- ✓ The study was led by researchers at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

