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1. India agrees to allow import of U.S. pork products (Jan. 12, 2022)

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack and Trade Representative Katherine Tai announced on 11 January 2022, that the Government of India has agreed to allow imports of U.S. pork and pork products into India.

India agrees to allow import of U.S. pork products

- This is a part of a deal with the Government of India **where India will import Pork and pork products, Alfalfa hay and cherries from the US and will export mangoes and pomegranate to the US.**
- This news follows the successful revitalization of the U.S.-India Trade Policy Forum held in New Delhi in November 2021 during the visit of Katherine Tai to India.
- The export of Indian mangoes has been restricted by the USA since 2020 as USDA (US Department of Agriculture) inspectors were unable to visit India for inspection of irradiation facilities due restrictions imposed on international travel because of Covid-19 pandemic,”
- In 2019-20, India exported 1,095 MillionTonnes of mangoes worth \$4.35 million to the United States.

2. U.S. announces \$308 mn in aid for Afghanistan as crisis grows (Jan. 12, 2022)

The United States has announced **\$308 million** in **additional humanitarian assistance for Afghanistan** as it edges towards a humanitarian crisis since the Taliban takeover in 2021.

U.S. announces \$308 mn in aid for Afghanistan as crisis grows

- The United States will donate an extra \$308m in humanitarian aid to Afghanistan, the White House has announced, bringing the total of US aid for Afghanistan and Afghan refugees in the region to nearly \$782m since October.
- The aid will be channelled through the US Agency for International Development (USAID) to humanitarian organisations providing shelter, healthcare, and emergency food aid, among other services.
- In August 2021 the US government froze nearly \$9.5 billion in assets belonging to the Afghan central bank and stopped shipments of cash to the nation after Taliban took over the country. The US has designated the Taliban in its sanction list and no funds can be provided to the Taliban government by the US government or by its banks.
- No country in the world recognises Taliban government in Kabul.

United Nation’s biggest appeal:

- Meanwhile, the United Nations said that it needed \$5 billion in aid for Afghanistan in 2022 to avert a humanitarian catastrophe and offer the ravaged country a future after 40 years of suffering.

3. South Korean trade minister’s visit to India (Jan. 12, 2022)

South Korean trade minister **Yeo Han-Koo visited** India on 11th January and agreed to expand trade by upgrading the existing bilateral agreement and resolving industry specific issues to achieve \$50 billion bilateral trade by 2030.

South Korean trade minister's visit to India

Highlight of the visit:

- Indian Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal and his counterpart agreed to impart fresh momentum to the discussions on CEPA (Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement) up-gradation negotiations.
- They also agreed to promote extensive B2B (business-to-business) interactions on trade and investment between the industry leaders of the two countries.
- The two ministers agreed with "the spirit of openness" to address difficulties expressed by industry from both sides and instructed their respective negotiating teams to meet on a regular basis in order to conclude the CEPA up-gradation negotiations as soon as possible to achieve the target of \$50 billion before 2030, which was agreed at the summit meeting in 2018.
- South Korea is one of the key investors in India, its total foreign direct investment to India up to September 2020 was about \$6.94 billion.

4. PM inaugurates 25th National Youth Festival in Puducherry (Jan. 12, 2022)

The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi inaugurated the 25th National Youth Festival in Puducherry, via video conferencing today. Today, being the birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda is observed as National Youth Day.

PM inaugurates 25th National Youth Festival in Puducherry

- During the event, the Prime Minister unveiled selected essays on "Mere Sapno ka Bharat" and "Unsung Heroes of Indian Freedom Movement".
- These essays have been selected from submissions by over 1 lakh youth on the two themes.
- The Prime Minister also inaugurated a Technology Centre of the MSME Ministry, established at Puducherry with an investment of about Rs. 122 crore.
- The Prime Minister also inaugurated the Perunthalaivar Kamarajar Manimandapam - an auditorium with an open-air theatre, constructed by the Government of Puducherry at a cost of about Rs 23 crores.

For more details about National Youth Festival kindly see January 6, 2022 post.

5. Suspension of MLA is worse than expulsion - Supreme Court of India (Jan. 12, 2022)

The Supreme Court of India observed that suspension from the Legislative Assembly for a year is "worse" than expulsion, as it affects the right of a constituency to remain represented in the House, otherwise it will create a constitutional void.

- The observation came, while a bench led by Justice A.M. Khanwilkar, which was hearing the pleas filed by 12 BJP MLAs who have challenged their one year suspension from the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly for allegedly misbehaving with the presiding officer.

- **The Supreme Court said the House cannot suspend a member beyond 59 days based on the statutory obligation under Article 190(4).**
- Article 190 (4) of the Constitution says that if for a period of 60 days, a member of a House, without its permission, is absent, the House may declare his or her seat vacant.

6. India's passport rank improves to 83 from 90 on Henley Passport Index 2022 (Jan. 12, 2022)

India has improved its passport power for the year 2022, climbing seven places to rank 83rd compared to last year's 90th position as it now has access to 60 countries that don't require a prior visa.

India's passport rank improves to 83 from 90 on Henley Passport Index 2022

- Henley passport Index ranks a country's passport according to the number of destinations the holder of the passport can visit without a visa.
- A visa is an official document which is issued by a country to a foreigner allowing it to legally visit the country. Passport is a proof of citizenship which is issued by a country to its citizen.

Henley Passport Index 2022 Highlights:

- The Henley Passport Index compares the visa-free access of 199 different passports to 227 travel destinations. If no visa is required, then a score of 1 is created for that passport. Where a visa is required a score of 0 is given.
- The country which has the maximum point is ranked at the top and the country which has the least point is ranked last.
- The country which ranked at the top is Japan and Singapore with a value of 192 points. The **Japanese and Singapore** passports are considered to be the most powerful passports in the world.
- At the second rank was Germany and South Korea with a value of 190.
- India was **ranked 83 with a value score of 60.**
- Afghanistan was ranked last at 111th position with a value score of 26.

7. Historic decision by UNESCO on World Hindi Day (Jan. 11, 2022)

The permanent delegation of India to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in Paris, Vishal Sharma announced that on the occasion of World Hindi Day (10th January 2022), UNESCO's World Heritage Centre (WHC) has agreed to publish Hindi descriptions of India's UNESCO World Heritage Sites on WHC (Vishwa Dharohar Samiti) website.

Historic decision by UNESCO on World Hindi Day

- This decision was welcomed by the Union Education and Skill Development minister Shri Dharmendra Pradhan. He said that Hindi is a matter of pride for every Indian and Hindi lover. The popularity of Indian languages on the global stage is welcoming and encouraging.

About UNESCO:

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations (UN).

- It seeks to build peace through international cooperation in Education, the Sciences and Culture.
- It is also a member of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG), a coalition of UN agencies and organizations aimed at fulfilling the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- Headquarters: **Paris, France**
- Director General: **Audrey Azoulay**
- Founded: **16 November 1945 in London, United Kingdom**
- The organisation has 193 members and 11 Associate members.

8. Union Labour Ministry releases July-Sept. 2021 employment figures (Jan. 11, 2022)

Union Minister for Labour & Employment, Shri Bhupender Yadav released the report on the second round of Quarterly Employment Survey (QES) part of the All-India Quarterly Establishment-based Employment Survey (AQEES) as of 01st July 2021.

Union Labour Ministry releases July-Sept. 2021 employment figures

- The AQEES has been taken up to provide frequent (quarterly) updates about the employment and related variables of establishments in both organized and unorganized segments of nine selected sectors which account for a great majority of the total employment in the non-farm establishments.

The nine selected sectors are :-

Manufacturing	Construction	Financial Services
Trade	Transport	Education
Health	Accommodation & Restaurant	IT/BPO

- The report on Quarterly Employment Survey being a demand-side survey along with supply-side survey i.e Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) will bridge data gaps on employment in the country
- The second round of QES had a reference date of 1st July 2021 for the different items of information about an establishment. Data were collected through field visits from 11,503 establishments, out of the 12,038 establishments selected in the sample.

Key Highlights of the Report-

- The estimated total employment in the nine selected sectors in this round of QES (July-September, 2021) came out as 3.10 crore approximately, which is 2 lakhs higher than the estimated employment (3.08 crore) from the first round of QES (April-June, 2021)
- Of the total employment estimated in the selected nine sectors,
 - Manufacturing accounted for nearly 39%
 - Education with 22%
 - Health around 10%
 - IT/BPOs sectors both around 10%
 - Trade and Transport sectors engaged 5.3% and 4.6% respectively.
 - It is pertinent to mention that percentage for the IT/BPO sector in Quarter 1 was only 7.
- **The overall percentage of female workers stood at 32.1, higher than 29.3% reported during the first round of QES.**
- Regular workers constitute 87% of the estimated workforce in the nine selected sectors, with only 2% being casual workers. However, in the Construction sector, 20% of the workers were contractual and 6.4% were casual workers.
- Out of all working in seven of the nine sectors (excluding Education and health)-
- 28.4% were secondary or less educated
- 37.0% were graduates or had higher qualifications. This was as high as 91.6% in the IT/BPO sector and 59.8% in Financial Services.
- In the Health and Education sector
 - 18% of the non-Clinical workers were secondary or less educated
 - 26.4% in the non-Teaching staff of the Education sector were secondary or less educated.
 - More than 40% of the employees in these two sectors were at least graduates.
- Nearly 90% of the establishments had less than 100 workers, while 30% of the IT/BPO establishments had at least 100 workers.
- 23.5% of all the establishments were registered under the Companies Act, this percentage was as high as 82.8% in IT / BPO, 51.2% in Construction, 42.8% in Manufacturing, 36.4% in Transport, 32.1% in Trade and 23.8% in financial services. The others were operating as registered societies, or registered under the Goods and Service Tax Act, 2017 or under Shops & Commercial Establishments Act, 1958.
- 5.6% of the total establishments had reported vacancies, a total of 4.3 lakh. While most of the vacancies (65.8%) were for unspecified reasons, 23% were due to resignation, and 11.7% were due to retirement of employees.

9. Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi sentenced to 4 years in prison (Jan. 11, 2022)

On 10th Jan 2020, a court in military ruled Myanmar sentenced ousted leader of National League for Democracy(NLD) party, Aung San Suu Kyi to four years in jail on charges including possession of unlicensed walkie talkies. She denies all charges.

Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi sentenced to 4 years in prison

- Ms. Suu Kyi was detained on the day of the February 1 coup and days later, police said six illegally imported walkie talkies were recovered during a search of her home. The court handed her a two year sentence for breaching an export-import law by possessing the handheld radios and one year for having a set of signal jammers.
- She was also sentenced to two years on another charge of breaching a natural disaster management law related to coronavirus rules.
- The junta said that Ms. Suu Kyi is being given due process by an independent court.
- Her trial has been closed to the media and Ms. Suu Kyi's lawyers have been barred from communicating with the media and public.
- The military has not even disclosed where she is detained.

For more details refer to the post on December 7, 2021.

10. Ghaziabad most polluted city in India followed by Delhi (Jan. 11, 2022)

In a recently published analysis report, Ghaziabad is ranked as the most polluted city in India out of the 132 nonattainment cities with the highest levels of PM 2.5 and PM 10 followed by Delhi.

Ghaziabad most polluted city in India followed by Delhi

- The analysis is by NCAP Tracker, a joint project by news portal Carbon Copy and a Maharashtra based startup 'Respirer Living Sciences', designed to track India's progress in achieving the clean air targets
- These cities are referred "nonattainment" as they consistently fail to meet the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) over a five-year period.
- For the PM 2.5 levels the CPCB's safe limit is 40 ug/m³ and WHO's safe limit is 5ug/m³
- Based on the Continuous Ambient Air Quality Monitoring System (CAAQMS) data, Delhi's PM 2.5 levels dropped from 108 ug/m³ in 2019 to 102 ug/m³ in 2021 and its PM 10 levels reduced from 217 ug/m³ to 207 ug/m³ during the same period after continuous monitoring.

National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)

- The Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change (MoEFCC) launched National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) in 2019 as a long-term, time-bound, national-level strategy to tackle the air pollution problem across the country in a comprehensive manner with targets to achieve 20% to 30% reduction in Particulate Matter concentrations by 2024 keeping 2017 as the base year for the comparison of concentration.
- The city-specific action plans have been prepared which, inter-alia, include measures for strengthening the monitoring network, reducing vehicular/industrial emissions, increasing public awareness, etc.

For detail about PM 2.5 and PM 10 kindly see December 1, 2021 post.