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1. Election Commission has reduced the Notice period for Political parties registration (Jan. 15, 2022)

The Election Commission of India has reduced the notice period for registering new political parties in the five election bound states of Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Manipur, Goa and Punjab from 30 days to 7 days due to the prevailing coronavirus pandemic.

- According to the Election commission a party seeking registration with the election commission has to publish its proposed names in two national newspapers and two local newspapers before applying to the election commission for registration.
- The election commission has clarified that the notice period was also reduced last year when elections were held in Bihar, Assam, Kerala, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal during the corona pandemic.

Registration of Political parties is governed by the provisions of Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951

- Chief Election Commissioner : Mr. Sushil Chandra

2. Bikaner -Guwahati express derailed in Bengal (Jan. 14, 2022)

Twelve compartments of the Guwahati bound 15633 Bikaner Guwahati Express got derailed yesterday evening near Moynaguri in West Bengal about 42kms from New Jalpaiguri Station. The train was running at a speed of 40kmph at the time of the accident.

Bikaner -Guwahati express derailed in Bengal

- **The train was coming from Bikaner station of Rajasthan and was going to Guwahati in Assam .**
- **The accident site comes under the Northeast Frontier Railway Zone of the Indian Railway .**
- BSF, National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) and local police are deployed in the area for rescue operations.
- As per reports till now 9 passengers are dead and about 50 severely injured. Currently they are being taken to the local hospital for medical care.
- **Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw** announced that a compensation of Rs 5 lakh has been extended to the families of the deceased while Rs 1 lakh each has been announced for those seriously injured. Also, Rs 25,000 each is being given to the mildly injured passengers. He himself is also on his way to the accident site.

3. Philippines to buy Brahmos missile from India (Jan. 14, 2022)

The Philippines on 14 January 2022 accepted BrahMos Aerospace's export-order proposal to provide supersonic cruise missiles for its navy. The major deal worth \$374.9 million was communicated to India through a Notice of Award by the Philippines Department of National Defence, signed by Secretary Delfinn Lorenzana.

Philippines to buy Brahmos missile from India

- The order directed BrahMos Aerospace to provide the supply of the Shore-based Anti-ship Missile System within ten calendar days of receiving the order.
- The BrahMos supersonic missile is produced by an Indo-Russian joint venture and can be launched from submarines, ships, aircraft or land.
- The BrahMos supersonic cruise missile can cover a range of 290 km reaching the Mach 2.8 to 3 Mach speed.

4. PM greets people across the nation on Makar Sankranti, Uttarayan, Bhogi, Magh Bihu and Pongal (Jan. 14, 2022)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has greeted the people in the country on the occasion of Makar Sankranti, Uttarayan, Bhogi, Pongal and Magh Bihu on 14 January 2022.

PM greets people across the nation on Makar Sankranti, Uttarayan, Bhogi, Magh Bihu and Pongal

Makar Sankranti

- **It is dedicated to Lord Surya (Sun God)** and marks the sun's transit into Makara (Capricorn) rashi (zodiac sign). This festival is considered the most auspicious occasion and is one of the few Hindu festivals aligned with the solar cycle.
- It marks the end of the winter season and the beginning of the harvest season when people worship new crops.
- This is the beginning of the month of Magh in the traditional Hindu calendar.

Uttarayan

Makar Sankranti is also associated with Uttarayan. According to Hindu belief, before Makar Sankranti, the Sun shines in the Southern Hemisphere and from Makar Sankranti day it moves into the Northern Hemisphere. That is why it is called Uttarayan.

However, scientifically it is not true.

Bhogi

- The festival is mainly celebrated in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, and Maharashtra.
- For people in South India, the year's first festival is celebrated as Bhogi, which marks the first day of Pongal.
- **On the day of Bhogi festival, devotees worship Lord Indra, the god of clouds and rains, and seek his blessings for the abundant harvest.**

Pongal

Pongal is a harvest festival celebrated by the Tamil community. It is a celebration to thank the Sun, Mother Nature and the various farm animals that help to contribute to a bountiful harvest.

- Celebrated over four days, Pongal also marks the beginning of the **Tamil month called Thai.**
- The first day of Pongal is called **Bhogi.**
- The second day is the main day of Pongal and is celebrated as **Surya Pongal.**
- The third day of Pongal is called **Mattu Pongal.**

- The fourth day of Pongal is called **Kaanum Pongal**.

Bihu

Bihu is a popular festival of Assam which is celebrated thrice a year.

- **Magha or Bhogali Bihu** is celebrated in the Mid-January. The festival marks the end of the harvesting season in the region. The Magh Bihu celebrations start on the last day of the month of 'pooh' in the Assamese calendar.
- **Bohag Bihu or Rongali Bihu**, is one of the biggest festivals celebrated in Assam. It celebrates the commencement of harvesting season and is also regarded as the first day of the Assamese New Year.

It is normally observed in Mid April

- **Kongali Bihu or Kati Bihu** is celebrated Mid-October or in the month of Kartik which is traditionally known as Kati. This Bihu is celebrated during the time of relocation of the rice sapling during the month of October. The granaries of the farmers usually remain empty during this time, hence it is known as Kongali (poor) Bihu.

5. Forest Survey report 2021 released by the Government (Jan. 13, 2022)

Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Shri Bhupender Yadav, today released the 'India State of Forest Report 2021' prepared by the Forest Survey of India (FSI).

Forest Survey report 2021 released by the Government

- Forest Survey of India releases " Indian State of Report " after every 2 years and the last report was released in 2019.
- FSI uses satellite data of the Indian Remote sensing satellite of ISRO, Resourcesat-2 to assess the forest cover in India .

Highlights of the report

- **The total forest and tree cover of the country is 80.9 million hectare which is 24.62 percent of the geographical area of the country.** As compared to the assessment of 2019, there is an increase of 2,261 sq km in the total forest and tree cover of the country. Out of this, the increase in the forest cover has been observed as 1,540 sq km and that in tree cover is 721 sq km.
- Increase in forest cover has been observed in open forest followed by very dense forest. **Top three states showing increase in forest cover are Andhra Pradesh (647 sq km) followed by Telangana (632 sq km) and Odisha (537 sq km).**
- **Area-wise Madhya Pradesh has the largest forest cover in the country followed by Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Maharashtra.**
- **In terms of forest cover as percentage of total geographical area, the top five States are Mizoram (84.53%), Arunachal Pradesh (79.33%), Meghalaya (76.00%), Manipur (74.34%) and Nagaland (73.90%).**
- 17 states/UT's have above 33 percent of the geographical area under forest cover. Out of these states and UT's, five states/UTs namely Lakshadweep, Mizoram, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya have more than 75 percent forest cover while 12 states/UTs namely Manipur, Nagaland, Tripura, Goa, Kerala, Sikkim,

Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh, Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu, Assam, Odisha, have forest cover between 33 percent to 75 percent.

- **Total mangrove cover in the country is 4,992 sq km.** An increase of 17 sq Km in mangrove cover has been observed as compared to the previous assessment of 2019. **Top three states showing mangrove cover increase are Odisha (8 sq km) followed by Maharashtra (4 sq km) and Karnataka (3 sq km).**
- Total carbon stock in the country's forest is estimated to be 7,204 million tonnes and there is an increase of 79.4 million tonnes in the carbon stock of the country as compared to the last assessment of 2019. The annual increase in the carbon stock is 39.7 million tonnes.

6. Resumption of Television Audience Measurement Ratings for 'News Genre' by BARC (Jan. 13, 2022)

The ministry of information and broadcasting has asked the Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC) to resume the release of Television Rating Points (TRPs) for news channels and sought the release of the data of the last three months for a "fair and equitable representation of true trends".

Resumption of Television Audience Measurement Ratings for 'News Genre' by BARC

- The resumption comes after over a year of TRPs being suspended following allegations of manipulation of ratings that emerged in October 2020. The Mumbai Police arrested at least five people over an alleged TRP scam
- As the controversy grew at the time, the Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC), which provides TRP data, announced a three-month long suspension of weekly ratings of news channels across languages.
- The ministry, has also set **up a working group under the chairmanship of the CEO, Prasar Bharati, Shashi Shekhar Vempati** for the consideration of leveraging the Return Path Data (RPD) capabilities for the use of TRP services, as also recommended by TRAI and the TRP Committee Report.

BARC

BARC (Broadcast Audience Research Council) India is a joint industry body, which includes broadcasters, advertisers, and advertising and media agencies.

- It was set up to design, commission, supervise and own an accurate, reliable and timely television audience measurement system for India. It is the world's largest television measurement science industry body based in Mumbai..
- It analyses the viewership habits of over 210 million TV households which makes it the world's largest television audience measurement service. Its measurement system is based on a sample of 40,000 "panel homes"
- It functions as per the recommendations of the TRAI (Telecom Regulatory Authority of India).
- Chairman - Punit Goenka
- CEO - Nakul Chopra

7. PM inaugurates 11 new medical colleges and a new campus of CICT in Tamil Nadu (Jan. 13, 2022)

The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi inaugurated 11 new medical colleges and a new campus of Central Institute of Classical Tamil (CICT) in Tamil Nadu on 12 January 2022 through video conference. Union Health Minister Dr Mansukh Mandaviya, and Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu M.K.Stalin were present on the occasion.

PM inaugurates 11 new medical colleges and a new campus of CICT in Tamil Nadu

- The new medical colleges are being established at an estimated cost of about Rs 4000 crore, out of which around Rs 2145 crore has been provided by the Union government and rest by the Tamil Nadu government.
- The districts in which the new Medical Colleges are being established are Virudhunagar, Namakkal, The Nilgiris, Tiruppur, Thiruvallur, Nagapattinam, Dindigul, Kallakurichi, Ariyalur, Ramanathapuram and Krishnagiri.
- The new medical colleges, with cumulative capacity of 1450 seats, are being established under the Centrally Sponsored scheme of 'Establishing of New Medical Colleges attached with existing district/referral hospital'. Under the scheme, medical colleges are established in districts, which do not have either a government or private medical college.
- The establishment of a new campus of Central Institute of Classical Tamil (CICT) in Chennai is in line with the Prime Minister's vision to protect and preserve Indian heritage and promote classical languages.
- The new campus is fully funded by the Union Government and is built at a cost of Rs 24 Crore.
- An autonomous organization under the Union Ministry of Education, CICT is contributing to the promotion of classical Tamil by doing research activities so as to establish the ancientness and uniqueness of Tamil language. The institute library has a rich collection of over 45,000 ancient Tamil Texts.

Statistics from PM's Speech-

- In 2014, the country had 387 medical colleges. Whereas in 2021, this number has gone up to 596. This is an increase of 54%.
- In 2014, India had around 82 thousand medical Undergraduate and Postgraduate seats. Whereas in 2021, this number has gone up to around 1 lakh 48 thousand seats. This is an increase of about 80%.
- In 2014, there were only seven AIIMS in the country. Whereas till 2021, the number of AIIMS approved has increased to 22.

8. POWERGRID and Africa50 will jointly pioneer Africa's first transmission PPP project in Kenya (Jan. 13, 2022)

Power Grid Corporation of India Limited (POWERGRID) has signed a Joint Development Agreement with Africa50, the pan-African infrastructure investment platform to continue to develop the Kenya Transmission Project on a public-private partnership basis.

POWERGRID and Africa50 will jointly pioneer Africa's first transmission PPP project in Kenya

- The project entails the development, financing, construction, and operation of the 400kV Lessos - Loosuk and 220kV Kisumu - Musaga transmission lines under a public-private partnership (PPP) framework.

- Once completed, the project will be the first Independent Power Transmission (IPT) in Kenya and will set a reference point in Africa as the first financing of transmission lines on a PPP basis.
- In this development partnership, POWERGRID, will provide technical and operational know-how to the project, while Africa50 will bring its project development and finance expertise and will act as a bridge between the Kenyan government and private investors.

About Africa50:

- Africa50 is an infrastructure investment platform that contributes to Africa's economic growth by developing and investing in bankable infrastructure projects, catalyzing public sector capital, and mobilizing private sector funding, with differentiated financial returns and impact.
- Africa50 currently has 31 shareholders, comprising 28 African countries, the African Development Bank, the Central Bank of West African States (BCEAO), and Bank Al-Maghrib.

9. JNU admission through CUET From 2022-23 Session (Jan. 13, 2022)

The Academic Council of Jawaharlal Nehru University in its 159th meeting cleared a proposal to conduct the varsity's entrance exam through the Common Universities Entrance Test(CUET) from the academic session 2022-23.

JNU admission through CUET From 2022-23 Session

As per the council, CUET would provide a level playing field to numerous eligible students from across the country reducing the burden of taking several entrance examinations.

Criticisms against the move-

- As per, JNU Students' Union, JNU offers programmes and courses that are unique to the university, and a 'one size fits all' approach of CUET will be detrimental in this regard.
- CUET will lead to JNU losing autonomy over the setting of question papers and declaration of results.
- CUET lacks transparency as it indicates pass/fail instead of displaying the student's grade.
- CUET with a centralized institutional set up, makes (any) redressal an elaborate procedure, further pushing aspirants belonging to the marginalized communities to deeper margins

CUET

The Common Universities Entrance Test (CUET) is an all-India test, organized for admission to various Integrated/Under-Graduate, Post Graduate, and Research Programmes in several Central Universities and State Universities of India. From its inception in 2010 till 2020, the CUCET was conducted/coordinated by the Central University of Rajasthan. The National Testing Agency took over the conduct of these exams in 2021. All Question papers are in MCQ Format.

10. NATO- Russia talk fails (Jan. 13, 2022)

The talks between the 30 member western military alliance **North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)** and Russia held at **Brussels**, Belgium on 12 January 2022 ended in a deadlock.

NATO- Russia talk fails

- The talks were held under the NATO-Russia Council Platform .The Secretary General of NATO, General Jens Stoltenberg said that it was impossible to meet the Russian demands regarding expansion of NATO and threat to Ukraine.
- The Russian delegation was led by deputy foreign minister, Aleksandr V. Grushko.

Russia had earlier submitted a list of demands to the United States which leads the NATO military alliance before the NATO -Russia Council platform meeting

The Russian demands were:

- A formal halt to NATO's eastern enlargement. It means that NATO shall not make Ukraine, Georgia and Finland its members.
- A permanent freeze on further expansion of the alliance's military infrastructure (such as bases and weapons systems) in the former Soviet allies which are now a part of NATO(these countries are Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Croatia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Montenegro)
- End to Western military assistance to Ukraine and a ban on intermediate-range missiles deployment in Europe.

Gen. Stoltenberg said it would be impossible for the 30 NATO members to agree to Moscow's core demands for a new security order in Europe, and in particular added that Russia would have no veto on Ukraine's right to eventually join the alliance.

Russia has already deployed around 100,000 troops at the Ukraine border and Western intelligence agency has warned that Russia plans to invade Ukraine. Russia denies that it has such a plan.

Kindly also see 3 December 2021 post