

NEWSPAPER HIGHLIGHT

In a big fillip to the fundamental rights of life, dignity and personal liberty, the Supreme Court has introduced a new system by which crucial decisions, including orders on bail and stay of arrest, can be communicated electronically to prison authorities and investigating agencies through a secure channel. Following an order on July 16 by a Special Bench led by Chief Justice of India N.V. Ramana, the top court introduced the “Fast and Secured Transmission of Electronic Records” (FASTER) system. The Bench approved its use. The system is meant to ensure that undertrials are not made to wait for days on end behind bars to be released because the certified hard copies of their bail orders took time to reach the prison.

Ahead of the reconstitution of the 24 Department Related Standing Committees (DRSC), Rajya Sabha Chairman M. Venkaiah Naidu sent a detailed record of participation by the members in committee meetings over the past year to the political parties, calling them to nominate members only based on their participation and interest. Only 16 members of the Rajya Sabha (out of 243 MPs) attended all the scheduled 361 meetings held in 2020.

Villagers have lost access to a vast grazing area near Gogra in eastern Ladakh owing to growing Chinese presence in the area, Konchok Stanzin, a councillor from Chushul, has said. Gogra is one of the several friction points in eastern Ladakh where Indian and Chinese troops have been engaged in a standoff since April/May 2020. The troops have disengaged from the north and south banks of the Pangong Tso and Gogra sector, creating “no zones” in areas along the undemarcated Line of Actual Control (LAC) that was regularly patrolled by Indian troops prior to April 2020. People fear that the Chinese are nibbling away at our territory. This was never a disputed area.

The Central government has informed the Delhi High Court that the PM CARES Fund is “not a fund of the Government of India and the amount does not go in the Consolidated Fund of India”. The affidavit filed by an Under Secretary at the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) said the PM CARES Fund was a charitable trust not created by or

GLOBAL INNOVATION INDEX 2021

1. India has climbed two spots and has been ranked 46th by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) in the Global Innovation Index 2021 rankings. India has been on a rising trajectory, over the past several years in the Global Innovation Index (GII), from a rank of 81 in 2015 to 46 in 2021.

2. Significance: The consistent improvement in the GII ranking is owing to the immense knowledge capital, the vibrant start-up ecosystem, and the amazing work done by the public and the private research organizations. The Scientific Departments like the Department of Atomic Energy; the Department of Science and Technology; the Department of Biotechnology and the Department of Space have played a pivotal role in enriching the National Innovation Ecosystem.

3. Global Innovation Index: **The Global Innovation Index (GII) is an annual ranking of countries by their capacity for, and success in, innovation. It is published by Cornell University, INSEAD, and the World Intellectual Property Organization, in partnership with other organisations and institutions.** It is based on both subjective and objective data derived from several sources, including the International Telecommunication Union, the World Bank and the World Economic Forum.

4. The index was started in 2007 by INSEAD and World Business, a British magazine. The GII is commonly used by corporate and government officials to compare countries by their level of innovation.

BEACH ENVIRONMENT & AESTHETICS MANAGEMENT SERVICES (BEAMS)

1. The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change in its pursuit of “Sustainable Development” of the coastal regions of India embarked upon a highly acclaimed & flagship program Beach Environment & Aesthetics Management Services (BEAMS).

2. What is it? **BEAMS is one of the initiatives under ‘Integrated coastal zone management’ (ICZM) approach that the MoEF&CC has undertaken for the sustainable development of coastal regions of India.**

3. The prime objective of ICZM approach is to protect and conserve the pristine coastal and marine ecosystems through holistic management of the resources.

VISHNUONYX

1. Recently, the fossil of Vishnuonyx neptuni (Neptune’s Vishnu) species was found in the Hammerschmiede area, a fossil site in Bavaria, Germany. Between 12.5 and 14 million years ago, the members of the Vishnuonyx genus of otters lived in the major rivers of southern Asia. 2. Fossils of these now extinct otters were first discovered in sediments found in the foothills of the Himalayas.

3. This is the first discovery of any member of the Vishnuonyx genus in Europe; it is also its most northern and western record till date.

4. **Vishnuonyx were mid-sized predators that weighed 10-15 kg. They depended on water and could not travel long distances over land.**

PARLIAMENTARY PRIVILEGES

1. Vice-President and Rajya Sabha Chairman M Venkaiah Naidu has said that disrupting parliamentary proceedings amounts to contempt of the House and it cannot be claimed as a privilege. This is the first time that a presiding officer of any legislature in the country has taken a public position on the issue of disruptions in the Parliament.

2. Productivity of Rajya Sabha: The productivity of Rajya Sabha has been quantified since 1978. During the first 19 years till 1996, the productivity of the House has been over 100 per cent, but it has begun to decline since then. While the House clocked an annual productivity of over 100 per cent during 16 out of these 19 years, it was so only in two years — in 1998 and 2009

under the Constitution or by any law made by Parliament or by any State legislature. PM CARES functioned with transparency and its funds were audited by an auditor, who is a chartered accountant drawn from the panel prepared by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi kicked off his first visit to the U.S. in two years, with meetings with CEOs of Fortune 500 companies in the morning and bilateral meetings with Vice President Kamala Harris and Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga of Japan and Scott Morrison of Australia scheduled.

Chief Justice of India (CJI) N.V. Ramana indicated the Supreme Court's intention to form a committee to examine allegations that the government used Israeli based Pegasus software to spy on citizens. The revelation came when the CJI informed senior advocate, who represented one of the petitioners in the case, that the court wanted to pass orders this week but could not do so because some of the members it had shortlisted for the committee were unavailable due to personal reasons.

The Centre told the Supreme Court that a caste census of the Backward Classes was "administratively difficult and cumbersome". While replying to a writ petition filed by the State of Maharashtra to gather Backward Classes' caste data in the State while conducting Census 2021, the Centre took the issue a step forward to clarify that "exclusion of information" regarding any other caste — other than Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes — from the purview of the census is a "conscious policy decision". Besides, the Centre said, it was too late now to enumerate caste into the Census 2021. Planning and preparations for the census exercise starts almost four years earlier. The phases of Census 2021 had been finalised after detailed deliberations with ministries, data users, recommendations from technical advisory committees, etc. Preparatory work was already in place.

The Defence Ministry placed an order with the Heavy Vehicles Factory (HVF), Avadi, for the supply of 118 indigenous Arjun Mk1A main battle tanks for the Army at a cost of ₹7,523 crore. "The state of the art MBT Mk1A is a new variant of Arjun tank designed to enhance fire power,

— that it clocked 100 percent productivity in the preceding 24 years. **Rajya Sabha has not clocked 100 percent productivity even once in the past 12 years.**

3. What are Parliamentary Privileges? Parliamentary Privileges are certain rights and immunities enjoyed by members of Parliament, individually and collectively, so that they can "effectively discharge their functions". **Article 105 of the Constitution expressly mentions two privileges, that is, freedom of speech in Parliament and right of publication of its proceedings.** Apart from the privileges as specified in the Constitution, the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908, provides for freedom from arrest and detention of members under civil process during the continuance of the meeting of the House or of a committee thereof and forty days before its commencement and forty days after its conclusion.

4. Role of the Speaker/Rajya Sabha (RS) Chairperson: The Speaker/RS chairperson is the first level of scrutiny of a privilege motion. The Speaker/Chair can decide on the privilege motion himself or herself or refer it to the privileges committee of Parliament. If the Speaker/Chair gives consent under relevant rules, the member concerned is given an opportunity to make a short statement.

CENTRAL BANK DIGITAL CURRENCY

1. The Reserve Bank of India has been working on a phased implementation strategy for a CBDC and the pilot may be launched by the end of this year.

2. The financial advisory services firm has listed four major use cases of CBDC in the Indian context. This includes: 'Fit-for-purpose' money used for social benefits and other targeted payments in a country. For such cases, the central bank can pay intended beneficiaries pre-programmed CBDC, which could be accepted only for a specific purpose. CBDCs could be used for faster cross-border remittance payments. International collaboration among the major economies of the world, including India, could help create the necessary infrastructure and arrangements for CBDC transfer and conversion. Payment instruments could be made available for payment transactions to be made via CBDC. Furthermore, universal access attributes of a CBDC could also include an offline payment functionality. Instant lending to micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in India can be possible with the help of CBDC.

3. Need for CBDC: An official digital currency would reduce the cost of currency management while enabling real-time payments without any inter-bank settlement. India's fairly high currency-to-GDP ratio holds out another benefit of CBDC — to the extent large cash usage can be replaced by CBDC, the cost of printing, transporting and storing paper currency can be substantially reduced. The need for inter-bank settlement would disappear as it would be a central bank liability handed over from one person to another.

4. SC Garg Committee recommendations (2019): Ban anybody who mines, hold, transact or deal with cryptocurrencies in any form. It recommends a jail term of one to 10 years for exchange or trading in digital currency. It proposed a monetary penalty of up to three times the loss caused to the exchequer or gains made by the cryptocurrency user whichever is higher.

SUBSTITUTE FOR SINGLE USE PLASTICS

1. IISc researchers find a way to substitute for single-use plastics. By combining non-edible oils and cellulose extracted from agricultural stubble, the researchers made biodegradable, multi use polymer sheets.

2. Significance: This can make a substitute for single-use plastic that can, in principle, help mitigate the problem of accumulating plastic waste in the environment. Background: In 2019, the Union government in a bid to free India of single-use plastics by 2022, had laid out a multi-ministerial plan to discourage the use of single-use plastics across the country.

3. The strategy: **A government committee has identified the single use plastic (SUP) items to be banned based on an index of their utility and environmental impact.** It has proposed a three-stage ban: The first category of SUP items proposed to be phased out are plastic sticks used in balloons, flags, candy, ice-cream and ear buds, and thermocol that is used in decorations. The second category, proposed to be banned from July 1, 2022, includes items such as plates, cups, glasses and cutlery such as

mobility and survivability. Infused with 72 new features and more indigenous content from the Mk1 variant, the tank would ensure effortless mobility in all terrains, besides precise target engagement during day and night,” the Defence Ministry said.

forks, spoons, knives, straws, trays; wrapping and packing films used in sweet boxes; invitation cards; cigarette packets; stirrers and plastic banners that are less than 100 microns in thickness.

4.What needs to be done? The government has to do a thorough economic and environmental cost-benefit analysis. The plan has to take into account social and economic impacts for the ban to be successful. We need better recycling policies because resources are poor and there needs to be a much broader strategy.