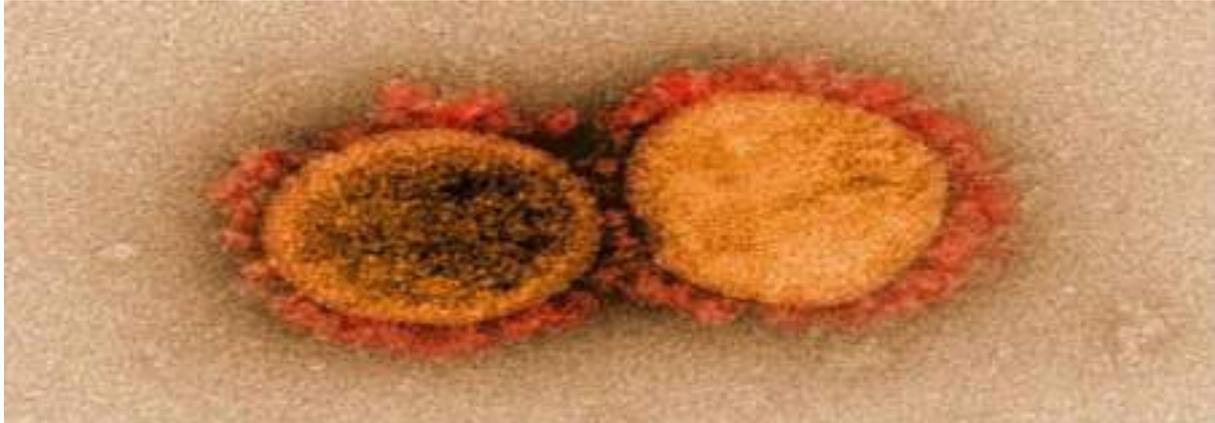


### **UK identifies new South African coronavirus variant, tightens lockdown**



Two cases of another new strain of Covid-19 linked to South Africa have been identified in the UK, Health Secretary Matt Hancock revealed. Like the UK variant identified earlier, the new variant of the novel coronavirus is also driving a massive resurgence of the disease in South Africa, with experts warning the country is probably facing a much larger second wave. This new variant is highly concerning because it is yet more transmissible and it appears to have mutated further than the new variant that has been discovered in the UK.

### **Israel to hold snap polls next year as Parliament fail to meet deadline to pass Budget**



Israel's parliament, the Knesset, was dissolved after the two main parties in its unity government failed to meet a deadline in a row over state budgets last night. Israel will now hold its fourth elections in two years in March next year, just 12 months after the last round. Two previous elections were inconclusive, resulting in a rare government of national unity.

Israel's parliament was automatically dissolved as required by law after a deadline to pass the 2020 state budget expired.

## Cairn Energy wins arbitration award



British energy major Cairn Energy has won an international arbitration case against the Indian government over a tax dispute. An international arbitration tribunal ruled that India's tax claim of Rs 10,247 crore in past taxes over internal reorganisation of Cairn's India business was not a valid demand. In a statement Cairn said that the tribunal has awarded damages of \$1.2 billion along with interest and costs.

The tribunal ruled unanimously that India had breached its obligations to Cairn under the UK-India Bilateral Investment Treaty and has awarded to Cairn damages of US\$1.2 billion plus interest and costs.

## Unicef launches Covid-19 vaccine market dashboard



The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) announced the launch of a COVID-19 vaccine market dashboard, an interactive tool to follow the developments of the rapidly evolving COVID-19 vaccine market and the efforts of the COVAX Facility to ensure fair and equitable access for every country in the world. The dashboard provides a regularly updated overview of the global research and development pipeline, the projected production capacity, publicly announced bilateral and multilateral supply agreements, as well as reported price points.

### **51st DG level talks between BSF India and BGB begins in Guwahati**



Fifty first DG level talks between Border Security Force India and Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) began in Guwahati. It is for the first time that the bi-annual talks between the two Border Guarding Forces is taking place in Assam. They will discuss various aspects and issues related to Border Management. They will also deliberate upon steps being taken to strengthen the security grid in a cohesive manner for betterment of people living on the borders of both the countries.

### **DRDO conducts successful trial of Medium Range Surface to Air MR-SAM missile from Chandipur off Odisha coast**



DRDO conducted the successful trial of the Medium Range Surface to Air MR-SAM missile from Chandipur off the Odisha coast. This was the army version of the MR-SAM missile which has been designed jointly by India and Israel. The missile is designed to provide the armed forces with air defence capability against a variety of air-borne targets at medium ranges.

## Cabinet approves post matric scholarship scheme for more than 4 Crore SC students



The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has approved 59 thousand 48 Crore rupees post matric scholarship scheme for more than 4 Crore Scheduled Castes students in 5 years. Briefing media, Social Justice and Empowerment Minister Thawarchand Gehlot said, the Central Government will spend 35 thousand 5 hundred 34 Crore rupees for it which is 60 per cent and the balance 40 per cent will be spent by the State Governments.

It is estimated that 1.36 Crore such poorest students, who are currently not continuing their education beyond 10th standard would be brought into the higher education system in the next 5 years.

## Cabinet gives nod to merger of 4 Film Media Units with NFDC through rationalization of infrastructure, manpower and other resources



The union Cabinet approved the merger of Films Division, Directorate of Film Festivals, National Film Archives of India, and Children's Film Society, India with National Film Development Corporation. Information and Broadcasting Minister Prakash Javadekar said, the merger of Film Media Units under one corporation will lead to convergence of activities and resources and better coordination. The Cabinet also approved the appointment of a Transaction Advisor and Legal Advisor who will advise on the transfer of assets and employees and oversee all aspects of operationalization of the merger.

### **Health Ministry issues SOP for Epidemiological Surveillance and Response for new variant of SARS-CoV 2 virus**



The Ministry of Health has issued Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for Epidemiological Surveillance and Response for a new variant of SARS- CoV 2 virus, which has been reported by the Government of the United Kingdom to the World Health Organization (WHO). This variant is estimated by European Center for Disease Control (ECDC) to be more transmissible and affecting the younger population.

This variant is defined by a set of 17 changes or mutations. One of the most significant mutations is in the spike protein that the virus uses to bind to the human ACE2 receptor. Changes in this part of the spike protein may result in the virus becoming more infectious and spreading more easily between people.

### **Eminent poet-activist Sugathakumari no more**



Eminent Malayalam poet, conservationist and women's activist, Sugathakumari, who had tested positive for COVID-19 died at the government medical college hospital. She was 86 . One of the most celebrated Malayalam poets of the contemporary era, Sugathakumari was known for her unique poems filled with compassionate empathy, human sensitivity and philosophical quest.

She had spearheaded the fiercest environmental campaign witnessed by Kerala--against a proposal to set up a hydel project in the Silent valley in Western Ghats three decades ago, and was also in the forefront of the recent agitation against construction of an airport at Aranmula. She was awarded Padma Shree in 2006 while the higher literary award Saraswati Samman reached her in 2013 for her poetic collection "Manalezhuth".

**Aero India latest edition to be held only on 3 business days**



**The Runway to a Billion Opportunities**

In view of COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions, the 13th edition of Aero India scheduled to be held in Bengaluru in February next year will be held only on three business days and the public will be able to witness the air display only in virtual mode, the Defence Ministry said.

**National Farmers' Day observed on December 23**



December 23 is commemorated as the National Farmers' Day or Kisan Divas in India in the honour of former Prime Minister Chaudhary Charan Singh, who was a premier farmers' leader of his time. This year, Kisan Diwas takes place against the backdrop of intensifying farmers' protests on the borders of the national capital.

In 2001, the government decided to recognise Choudhary Charan Singh's contribution to the agriculture sector and welfare of farmers by celebrating his birth anniversary as Kisan Diwas.

### **NIPFP pegs best-case GST revenue gap at Rs. 1.95 lakh crore**



The revenue shortfall for the Goods and Services Tax (GST) compensation payable to States in 2020-21 could be about Rs. 1.95 lakh crore in the best-case scenario, significantly lower than the Rs. 2.35 lakh crore estimated by the GST Council, as per a new research paper by the National Institute for Public Finance and Policy (NIPFP). In a paper titled 'The Pandemic and GST Revenue: An Assessment for Union and States', Sacchidananda Mukherjee, an associate professor at NIPFP, estimated that even in the worst-case scenario, the revenue shortfall for GST compensation to States won't exceed ₹2.45 lakh crore.

The revenue gap in State GST collections is expected to vary between ₹2.85 lakh crore and ₹3.27 lakh crore. GST compensation cess collection in FY21 is expected to vary between ₹82,242 crore and ₹90,386 crore. Therefore, shortfall in GST compensation fund is expected to vary between ₹1.95 lakh crore to ₹2.45 lakh crore," the paper concluded.

### **Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman concludes pre-Budget meetings for forthcoming Union Budget 2021-22**



Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman concluded pre-Budget meetings for forthcoming Union Budget 2021-22. Ms. Sitharaman chaired the pre-budget consultation meetings held in virtual mode from 14th December till date. More than 170 invitees representing 9 stakeholder groups participated in 15 meetings scheduled during this period. The stakeholder groups include, Financial and Capital Markets, Health, Education and Rural Development, Water and Sanitation, Trade Union and Labour Organization, Industry, Services and Trade, Infrastructure, Agriculture and Agro Processing Industry, Industrialists and Economists.

### **Beware of illegal digital lending apps: RBI**



The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) cautioned individuals and small businesses against falling prey to growing number of unauthorised digital lending platforms and mobile applications on promises of getting loans in quick and hassle-free manner. These platforms charge excessive rates of interest and additional hidden charges, adopt unacceptable and high-handed recovery methods and misuse agreements to access data on mobile phones of borrowers. Moreover, it urged consumers not to share copies of KYC documents with unidentified persons, unverified/unauthorised apps and should report such incidents to concerned law enforcement agencies.

### **Bharti pips Jio again in mobile user addition, Oct. figures show**



India's telecom subscriber base grew to more than 1.17 billion in October with Bharti Airtel maintaining its leadership in mobile subscriber addition, according to the monthly report released by sector regulator TRAI. This is the second consecutive month when Airtel added highest number of subscribers. In September, it had regained the leadership position in subscriber addition after a gap of four years. Airtel company added 3.67 million new customers in October, taking its total wireless customer base to 330.28 million in October 2020.

Airtel was followed by Reliance Jio, which added 2.22 million new mobile customers, taking its total subscriber base to 406.35 million during the reported month. The other four mobile service providers -- Vodafone Idea Ltd (VIL), BSNL, MTNL and Reliance Communications -- reported loss of subscriber base.

### ICICI Bank launches 'Infinite India' for foreign companies setting up operations in India



ICICI Bank launched 'Infinite India' - an online platform for foreign companies looking to set up or increase business in India. This platform provides banking solutions, as well as value-added facilities. 'Infinite India' platform offers convenience to foreign companies as it eliminates the need of co-ordinating with multiple touch-points leading to a hassle-free experience of doing business in India.

### PE investment in realty to bounce back to \$6 bn



Private equity investment in real estate is expected to bounce back to \$6 billion, registering a 30% year-on-year growth in 2021 on the back of an improving economic sentiment supported by policy reforms and growth in key emerging sectors, Savills India, a global property consultancy firm, said in a report.

### **Nihal Sarin, Rakshitta Ravi and D Gukesh win gold medals at Online World Youth and Cadet Rapid Chess Championships**



Grandmaster Nihal Sarin, Woman International Master Rakshitta Ravi and D Gukesh won the titles in their respective categories in the FIDE Online World Youth and Cadet Rapid Championships. Highly-rated Sarin beat Armenian GM Shant Sargyan 1.5-0.5 in the Open under-18 section final, Rakshitta Ravi also won by a similar margin against China's Song Yuxin in the girls under-16 final.

### **Qatar To Host FIFA Club World Cup 2020 Across Three Venues**



Qatar will host the FIFA Club World Cup from February 1 to 11, 2021, after it was postponed earlier this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Six continental confederations, as well as the host nation's league champions, will compete in the tournament, which will be held across three FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 stadiums -- Ahmad Bin Ali, Khalifa International and Education City.

### Landmark goal for Messi in Barcelona's victory



Lionel Messi overtook Pele's record of goals for a single club as Barcelona strolled to a 3-0 La Liga win at Real Valladolid, while Atletico Madrid kept hold of their place at the top of the table. Messi struck his 644th goal for Barca, one more than Brazil legend Pele scored for Santos.