

Record 488 journalists jailed, 46 killed in 2021, says RSF



There are currently 488 media professionals imprisoned around the world, the highest number since Reporters Without Borders began counting more than 25 years ago, the NGO announced. By contrast, the number killed this year 46 was the lowest since it began issuing annual tallies, due to the relative stabilisation of conflicts in the West Asia. RSF said it had also never seen so many female journalists detained, with the overall number of 60 representing a third more than 2020.

China leads the way for imprisoned journalists with 127, thanks in large part to the national security law it imposed on Hong Kong, undermining many of its long-standing democratic freedoms. Myanmar was second with 53, followed by Vietnam (43), Belarus (32) and Saudi Arabia (31).

U.S. imposes sanctions against China over abuse of Uighurs



The Biden administration said it is imposing new sanctions on several Chinese biotech and surveillance companies and government entities for actions in Xinjiang province, the latest step against Beijing over human rights abuses of Uighur Muslims. The Commerce Department is targeting China's Academy of Military Medical Sciences and its 11 research institutes that focus on using biotechnology to support the Chinese military.

Super Typhoon Rai hammers Philippines



Thousands of people in the Philippines fled their homes and beachfront resorts as Super Typhoon Rai pummelled the country on Thursday. Rai is the strongest storm to hit the disaster-prone archipelago this year. The typhoon carries maximum sustained winds of 175 km/h and gusts of up to 240 km/h, while moving westward at 35 km/h.

Omicron infects 70 times faster than Delta, but likely less severe: study



The Omicron variant of SARS-CoV-2 infects and multiplies faster than the Delta variant and original SARS-CoV-2 in the human bronchus, which may explain why it may transmit faster between people than previous variants. However, it does not easily infect the lower lungs and this, researchers say, potentially explains why instances of severe disease are proportionally lower in cases involving Omicron.

The study was led by researchers from the LKS Faculty of Medicine at the University of Hong Kong.

India marks 50 years of 1971 victory



Prime Minister Narendra Modi led the nation in paying tribute to the heroes of the 1971 India-Pakistan war and marking 50 years of victory in the third war with the neighbour that led to the liberation of Bangladesh and is globally recognised as a glorious and unforgettable chapter in India's military history. Pakistan's unconditional surrender involving 93,000 soldiers was the biggest in the world after the Second World War.

Kolkata's Durga Puja gets UNESCO heritage tag



The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) inscribed "Durga Puja in Kolkata" on the "Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity". According to UNESCO, the festival was the only Indian one to make it to its list of 20 events and traditional activities. As many as 36,946 community pujas are organised across the state every year. Of these, around 2,500 are held in Kolkata. India now has 14 intangible cultural heritage elements on the UNESCO list.

Cabinet nod to raise girls' marriage age to 21



The Centre has decided to raise the legal age of marriage of women from 18 to 21 years and is likely to move legislative amendments in the ongoing winter session of Parliament. The Union Cabinet cleared a proposal to bring uniformity in the marriageable age of men and women, adding that a Bill to amend the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA), 2006, will be introduced during this session.

The proposed Bill may also contain amendments to various personal laws relating to marriage of various communities to ensure a uniform age of marriage. As of now, the legal age of women to get married is 18, while that for men is 21.

Bullock cart races get SC approval



The Supreme Court of India gave the nod to resume bullock cart races in Maharashtra that were prohibited since 2017. A Bench led by Justice A.M. Khanwilkar said the amended rules notified by the State under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960 would apply to the conduct of the races until a final decision is arrived at by a Constitution Bench of the court.

Supreme Court orders appointment of man with bipolar disorder as judge



The Supreme Court of India has ordered immediate appointment of a bipolar man as a judicial officer in Delhi, with appropriate seniority. A bench, headed by justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul, held that there was no impediment in Bhavya Nain taking charge as a judicial officer in one of the district courts in the national capital and discharging his duties as a judge.

Railways starts to run 4 Rajdhani Express trains with new upgraded Tejas Rakes



Indian Railways has introduced a new era of train travel experience with enhanced comfort with the conversion of Rajdhani Express coaches with new upgraded Tejas Trains. Currently, Railways is operating four Rajdhani Trains with Tejas Sleeper Coaches. The introduction of this modern Tejas Sleeper type train for long-distance journey is another paradigm shift by Indian Railways for enhancing the travel experience for the passengers.

Army Chief Gen Naravane Takes Charge As Head Of Chiefs Of Staff Committee



Army Chief Gen MM Naravane has assumed the charge as the chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee that comprises the three service chiefs. The post fell vacant following the death of Chief of Defence Staff Gen Bipin Rawat in the IAF helicopter crash on December 8. Gen Naravane has been given the charge as the chairman of the committee as he is the senior-most among the three service chiefs.

IAF Chief Air Chief Marshal V R Chaudhari and Navy Chief Admiral R Hari Kumar had taken over their respective positions on September 30 and November 30. Before the creation of the post of the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), the senior-most among the three service chiefs used to be the chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee.

52.88 lakh houses out of 1.14 cr. sanctioned under PMAY-U completed



Out of 1.14 crore houses sanctioned under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban (PMAY-U), a total of 52.88 lakh had been completed or delivered to the beneficiaries so far, according to a reply by Minister of State for Housing and Urban Affairs Kaushal Kishore in the Lok Sabha. Out of the completed houses, the highest were in Uttar Pradesh (9.75 lakh), Gujarat (6.26 lakh). A total of 89.62 lakh houses had been grounded for construction, it said.

India's rice exports rose by over 33% to 11.79 MT in first seven months of current FY, likely to surpass last FY's record over 17MT



India's rice exports rose by over 33 percent to 11.79 million tonnes in first seven months of this current financial year. Commerce and Industry Ministry said, India's rice exports in the current fiscal are likely to surpass the record feet of 17.72 million tonnes achieved in 2020-21. The Ministry said, India continues to expand its rice exports footprint in the African, Asian and European Union markets. It said, the robust global demand also helped India's growth in rice exports.

Public sector bank unions go on 2-day strike



Public sector bank unions went on a two-day strike from Thursday to protest against privatisation of banks and demand that the government withdraw the Banking Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2021 that would enable the government to reduce its share in public banks. The unions, under the banner of the United Forum of Bank Unions, had asked the government during talks to give an assurance that the Bill would not be introduced, though it had been listed in the agenda for the ongoing Winter Session of Parliament, said All-India Bank Employees' Association (AIBEA) general secretary.

Ashok Leyland in pact with DRDO arm to develop combat vehicle engines



Ashok Leyland has partnered with Combat Vehicles Research and Development Establishment (CVRDE), a premier lab of Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), to develop and manufacture 600-HP indigenous engine to power futuristic combat vehicles under Atmanirbhar Bharat mission. As the development-cum-production partner, Ashok Leyland has developed the engine in a record time despite the total lockdown due to Covid-19

Regulation needed for cryptocurrencies: IMF



International Monetary Fund (IMF) Chief Economist Gita Gopinath has made a strong case for regulating cryptocurrencies, saying it will always be a challenge to ban them as they operate from offshore exchanges. Ms. Gopinath also suggested a global policy and coordinated action for regulating cryptocurrencies.

FDI may decline 20% in FY22, trend to weigh on rupee: UBS



Inflows into India via foreign direct investments (FDI) may decline by about 20% this fiscal after the all-time high investments of close to \$82 billion received in FY21, UBS Global said in a research report. India's net FDI inflows have slowed in the first half of calendar year 2021 after very strong FDI inflows in the second half of 2020," UBS said.

IMF warns of interest rate risks as global debt hits \$226 trillion



Global debt surged to \$226 trillion last year, its biggest one-year jump since World War Two, and will be put at risk if global interest rates rise faster than expected and growth falters, the International Monetary Fund said. In a blog posting, IMF officials said the COVID-19 pandemic caused debt to hit 256% of global GDP in 2020, an increase of 28 percentage points. Government borrowing accounted for slightly over half of the \$28 trillion increase, but private debt among non-financial corporations and households also hit new highs.

Advanced economies and China accounted for 90% of the debt rise, enabled by low interest rates. Debt rose less in other developing countries, which were hampered by often higher borrowing costs and limited access to funding, the IMF said.

Power discoms owe gencos more than Rs. 1.56 lakh cr.: Singh



Total outstanding dues owed by power distribution utilities or discoms to generation firms (gencos) are estimated to be more than Rs. 1.56 lakh crore, Parliament was informed. “Discoms have not been able to pay the generation companies for the power procured, and the outstanding payments to generation companies are estimated to be in excess of Rs. 1,56,000 crore,” Power Minister R. K. Singh said in a written reply to the Lok Sabha.

Ola raises \$500 mn from global firms



Mobility platform Ola has raised \$500 million through term loan B from international institutional investors. The proposed loan issuance received a ‘staggering response’ from investors with interest and commitment of \$1.5 billion, the firm said.

Pakistan completes 3-0 sweep



Mohammad Rizwan (86) and Babar Azam (79) starred with the bat as Pakistan defeated West Indies by seven wickets in the third and final T20I here at the National Stadium. With this win, Pakistan won the three-match series 3-0. Earlier, Nicholas Pooran's 64-run knock helped West Indies post 207/3 in 20 overs.