

Russia drafts pact to limit U.S., NATO role in ex-Soviet nations



Russia unveiled proposals to contain the U.S. and NATO in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, calling for urgent negotiations with Washington as it amasses forces near Ukraine. Russia released unfinished security documents that call for U.S.-led NATO alliance not to bring in new members or establish bases in ex-Soviet countries. It also insists that alliance members not conduct military activity in Ukraine or other countries in Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia.

Modi to get Bhutan's top civilian award



Bhutan conferred the Order of the Druk Gyalpo, its highest civilian honour, on Prime Minister Narendra Modi. This was announced on the occasion of the 114th national day of Bhutan. This is Mr. Modi's 10th international award given by various governments. Every year, on December 17, Bhutan marks the national day in memory of the birth of the Wangchuk dynasty in 1907. On that day, Druk Gyalpo Ugyen Wangchuk was coronated as the king of Bhutan.

Bhutan was the first country that Mr. Modi visited upon taking charge as Prime Minister.

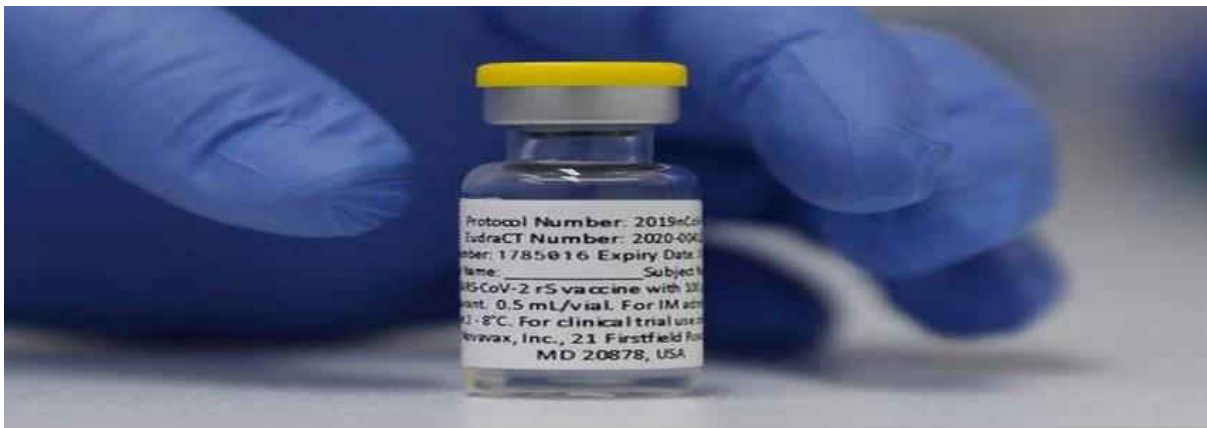
President Ram Nath Kovind inaugurates Dhaka's historic Kali Mandir destroyed by Pakistani Army in 1971



President Ram Nath Kovind inaugurated a famous Hindu temple in Dhaka that was destroyed by Pakistani forces in 1971. He declared that the revived shrine represents the “spiritual and cultural” bonds between India and Bangladesh. The plaque unveiled by President Kovind stated that the construction of these sections had been done by the Government of India.

The original Ramna Kalibari was built during the medieval era and was famous for its tall structure. In 1929, the temple complex acquired an additional building for the devotees of the famous saint Anandamayee, who later became Prime Minister Indira Gandhi’s spiritual advisor.

WHO nod for Serum Institute’s Covovax



Covovax, the COVID-19 vaccine manufactured by the Serum Institute of India (SII), received emergency use nod from the World Health Organisation (WHO). The vaccine is being produced by the Pune-based SII under licence from American biotechnology company Novavax, and is part of the COVAX facility portfolio, giving a much-needed boost to ongoing efforts to vaccinate more people in lower-income countries.

Avoid non-essential travel, says Centre



The Omicron variant of the Coronavirus is "growing swiftly" in India, with 101 cases reported in 11 states, according to the Health Ministry, which also warned that 19 areas were at high risk of an increase in COVID-19 infections. Faced with the potential of a third wave of infections, the ministry emphasised the need to practise Covid-appropriate behaviour, such as wearing face masks and keeping social distance. The government also advised citizens to avoid unnecessary travel and to avoid huge groups and gatherings. The federal government has previously asked states to increase surveillance and prioritise sequencing positive samples in order to identify cases and possible hotspots.

ISRO signed 6 agreements with 4 countries to launch foreign satellites during 2021-23: Jitendra Singh



Minister of State for Atomic Energy and Space Dr. Jitendra Singh has said that Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has signed six agreements with four countries for launching foreign satellites during 2021-2023. In a written reply to a question in the Rajya Sabha, Dr Singh said that about 132 Million Euros will be earned through launching of these foreign satellites on a commercial basis.

The Minister said, starting from 1999, a total of 342 foreign satellites belonging to 34 countries have been successfully launched on a commercial basis.

ICMR approves indigenously developed kit to detect current COVID-19 variants



The CoviDelta diagnostics kit developed indigenously by Pune-based GenePath Diagnostics has been approved by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR). The kit detects all current variants of COVID-19 and flags presumptive Delta and Omicron variants in a single test, said Nickhil Jakatdar, CEO, GenePath Diagnostics. The test shows high sensitivity and specificity.

CCI freezes Amazon-Future deal, slaps Rs. 200 crore fine on U.S. firm



The Competition Commission of India (CCI) froze its approval given in November 2019 to Amazon's investment in a Future Group unit on the grounds that the U.S. e-commerce company had suppressed the scope and full details of its investment while seeking regulatory approval. The antitrust regulator also imposed a penalty of Rs. 200 crore on Amazon for failing to notify the details of its 'combination', as required in law. It also imposed a separate penalty of Rs. 2 crore for suppressing the actual scope and purpose of the combination, a term used in competition law for acquisition, merger or amalgamation of two or more enterprises.

Union Minister Giriraj Singh launches MIS portal for rankings of States/UTs in Land Acquisition Projects



Union Minister for Rural Development and Panchayati Raj Giriraj Singh launched MIS (Management Information System) portal for rankings of States/UTs in Land Acquisition Projects under RFCTLARR Act, 2013. (Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013). On the occasion, Union Minister also announced that as per the ranking and performance, the top 3 States and top 3 districts will be awarded. Calling it a 'Vikas Portal', Shri Giriraj Singh said that this MIS portal will not show only data and figures but it will show the speed of the development in the country.

DoT to simplify process for satellite service nod



The Department of Telecom (DoT) is working on simplifying the process for setting up satellite networks for expeditious roll-out of services. Bharti group-backed OneWeb and U.S.-based SpaceX group firm Starlink Satellite Communications are in the fray to start satellite-based broadband services in India.

ArcelorMittal Nippon Steel to invest Rs. 1.02 lakh cr. in Odisha



The Odisha government approved ArcelorMittal Nippon Steel's proposal to set up a 24 million tonne per annum integrated steel plant in Mahakalpara block of Kendrapara district at an estimated investment of Rs. 1.02 lakh crore. Touted to be the largest project in the country's manufacturing sector, the proposed facility of AM/NS (the Kendrapara complex), would produce various grades of steel with its latest 'green' steel making technology and also make 18.75 MTPA of cement.

On completion, the steel and cement facilities would both be India's largest single location greenfield projects, respectively. The project is proposed to be completed in phases over seven years.

India registers highest-ever annual FDI inflow of 81.97 billion dollars in 2020-21



India has registered the highest ever annual Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflow of 81.97 billion dollar in 2020-21. Commerce and Industry Ministry said, FDI inflows in the last seven financial years is over 440 billion dollars, which is nearly 58 percent of the total FDI inflow in last 21 financial years. The Ministry said, top five countries from where FDI Equity Inflows were received during 2014 to 2021 are Singapore, Mauritius, USA, Netherlands and Japan. Computer Software and Hardware sector attracted the largest share of FDI inflows, followed by Service, Trading and Telecommunications.

Bharti clears deferred dues for 2014 spectrum



Telecom operator Bharti Airtel had paid Rs. 15,519 crore to the government towards prepayment of its entire deferred liability pertaining to spectrum acquired in the 2014 auction. The company had acquired 128.4 MHz spectrum (including Telenor spectrum) for Rs. 19,051 crore in the 2014 auction.

SBI lifts base rate a tad, to affect pre-2019 loans



State Bank of India (SBI) has increased the benchmark lending rate or base rate by 10 basis points, to 7.55%. The new rate is effective from December 15, it said. The decision will not affect loans taken since January 2019 but will affect those who borrowed before that. SBI had migrated to External Benchmark Lending Rate (EBLR) linked to repo rate since January 2019. There is no change in EBLR as this rate changes with a change in the benchmark interest rate of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

The bank also revised the benchmark prime lending rate to 12.3%. For domestic term deposits, SBI raised the rate by 10 basis points for deposits over Rs. 2 crores.

Advance tax collection rises 54% to Rs. 4.60 lakh cr.



The finance ministry said advance tax collection increased by 53.50% to Rs. 4.60 lakh crore so far this fiscal year, indicating recovery in the economy. Direct tax collections for 2021-22, as on December 16, show that net collections are at Rs. 9.45 lakh crore compared with Rs. 5.88 lakh crore over the year-earlier period, representing an increase of 60.8%, the ministry said.

The cumulative advance tax collections for the first, second and third quarter of 2021-22 stand at Rs. 4,59,917.1 crore as on December 16, 2021, against advance tax collections of Rs. 2,99,620.5 crore for the corresponding period of 2020-21, a growth of about 53.5%.

India offers 8 oil, gas blocks for bidding in latest round



India has offered 8 oil and gas blocks, mostly in Assam, for bidding in the latest bid round with a view to bringing more area under exploration, so as to increase domestic production and reduce imports. The "8 Blocks spread over 6 Sedimentary Basins, 5 States covering 15,766 sq. km of area. Out of 8 Blocks, 5 Blocks are Onland type, 2 Blocks are Shallow Water-type and 1 Block is Ultra Deep-Water type. Three of the five onland blocks are in Assam Arakan or Assam Shelf while one is in Rajasthan. One block in the Satpura basin has also been offered. Two shallow water blocks are in Cambay off the Gujarat coast while one ultra-deepwater block in the Cauvery basin is also on offer.

Flower appointed Lucknow head coach



Former Zimbabwe captain Andy Flower was appointed head coach of the yet-to-be-named Lucknow franchise, which will make its debut in the 2022 Indian Premier League. Flower is the first appointment on the coaching staff by the Lucknow franchise, which was bought by Indian business conglomerate RP Sanjiv Goenka Group (RPSG) in August for nearly USD 1 billion.

Purnima wins gold



Purnima Pandey created eight National records on the way to gold in the women's +87kg category at the Commonwealth Championships. Purnima lifted 229kg (102 + 127) to take the title and qualify directly for next year's Commonwealth Games. Purnima created eight national records, two in the snatch section and three each in clean and jerk and total category.

Harmanpreet's strikes help India beat Pakistan



Vice-captain Harmanpreet Singh scored a brace as Olympic bronze-medallists India defeated Pakistan 3-1 to register its second consecutive win and virtually qualify for the semifinals of the Asian Champions Trophy men's hockey tournament. Harmanpreet (8th, 53rd minutes) converted two penalty corners, while comeback-man Akashdeep Singh, who couldn't make the Tokyo Olympics squad, found the net from a field effort in the 42nd minute for his second goal of the tournament.