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India's Best Institute for IES, GATE & PSUs

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WEEKLY
CURRENT AFFAIRS**

WEEK-4

22nd February- 28th February, 2021

Targeted Examinations:
CSE, ESE, PSUs, State Exams,
SSC and Banking Exams

22nd FEBRUARY 2021

IIT Council: Decision-making body of IITs

- The IIT Council has set up four independent panels. The panel will discuss a range of topics ranging from financing to graduated autonomy in the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs).

Key Highlights:

- The IIT Council was headed by Minister of Education Ramesh Pokhriyal.
- The Council will also discuss topics such as mobility of faculties between classrooms and sectors, broader use of technology in educational activities and distribution, streamlining of personnel, grooming faculties to become directors.

Four committees of IIT council

- The four committees were formed on the advice of the Chair of the Standing Committee of the IIT Council. In line with the National Education Policy-2020, they were constituted on understated issues:
 - Group-1:** Graded Autonomy, Empowered & accountable BoG and Director;
 - Group-2:** Grooming distinguished academics for directorship of IITs;
 - Group-3:** Reform and restructuring of Academic Senate;
 - Group-4:** Innovative funding mechanisms.

NOTE:

The Council of Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT Council) is the governing body. This body is responsible and accountable to all Indian Institutes of Technology in India.

Limited Trade Pact Agreement

- The Detailed Economic Cooperation and Collaboration Arrangement between India and Mauritius (CECPA). This was the first trade deal ever signed with any African country.

Key Highlights:

- Under the deal, India will be allowed exclusive access to the markets in Mauritius and vice versa.
- India will have access to 310 products, while Mauritius will have access to 615 products.
- India will also have connections to 115 sub-sectors in 11 large services sectors.
- India will have access to food & drinks, agricultural goods, textiles & clothes, etc. while Mauritius will have access to frozen seafood, cookies, specialty sugar, fresh fruit, juices.

India-Mauritius Trade relation

- Bilateral trade between India and Mauritius rose from \$207 million in 2005-06 to \$690 million in the financial year 2020. This reflects a 233 per cent rise in trade.
- In addition, Indian exports to Mauritius rose from \$199 million to \$662 million in the same period. This reflects a rise of 232 percent.

VL-SRSAM missile system

- The Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO) has successfully deployed the two natively planned and produced Vertical Launch Short Range Air Missiles (VL-SRSAM).

Key Points:

- The missiles were launched using static vertical launchers.
- They were launched from the Integrated Test Range, Chandipur off the coast of Odisha.
- Missile launches were supervised by senior lab scientists who helped build and design the device.
- Vertical Launch Short Range Air Missile Surface (VL-SRSAM) was originally developed and engineered by DRDO. Missiles were launched by the Indian Navy.

Mumbai's Undersea Tunnel

- Mumbai will launch India's first underwater tunnel in 2023, which is being developed as part of the Mumbai Coastal Road project.

Key Facts

- Two tunnels will be constructed under the Mumbai Coastal Road Scheme.
- The tunnel would have a length of 2.07 km, 1 km of which will be under the sea.
- It's the first underwater road tunnel in India.
- It's going to cross the Arabian Sea near Girgaon Chowpatty.
- The tunnel will start from Priyadarshini Park and end at Netaji Subhash Road on Marine Drive. It's going to be constructed at a depth of 20m below the seabed.

23rd FEBRUARY 2021

Vulture Toxic Drugs

- Bangladesh was the first nation to prohibit ketoprofen. This painkiller is widely used to treat cattle. But the analgesic is toxic to the vultures.
- This is a groundbreaking effort to save the remaining population from internationally endangered vultures.

Key Points:

- Save Asia's Vultures from Extinction (SAVE) report states that ketoprofen is now commonly used as a major anti-inflammatory medicine by vets in Bangladesh.
- Yet non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications (NSAIDs) such as diclofenac and ketoprofen are a significant threat to vultures in South Asia. These medications have contributed to a devastating 99.9 per cent reduction in white-haired vultures in the area.

About Indian Vultures

- The scientific name of the vulture is Gyps Indicus. The vulture is native to India, Pakistan and Nepal. It breeds in the hilly areas of central and peninsular India.
- In the mid-1990s, the population of three of nine Indian species of vultures, namely white-tailed vultures, long-billed vultures and slender-billed vultures, decreased by 90%.

- The vulture had been listed since 2002 as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List.

■ NOTE:

Indian government banned the use of diclofenac for veterinary purposes in 2006.

China: India's top Trade Partner

- According to preliminary data from India's Ministry of Commerce, facing high border tensions between the two countries, China reclaimed its position as India's top trading partner in 2020.

Key Highlights:

- The two-way trade between India and China amounted to USD 77.7 billion in 2020. The overall trade with China amounted to USD 85.5 billion in the previous year (2018-2019).
- Imports of heavy equipment, etc., outweighed India's attempts to reduce its trade dependency.
- As a result, India's bilateral trade deficit with China was \$40 billion in 2020.

India-China Relation:

- The relationship between the two countries has varied over time. Both countries have pursued economic cooperation with each other despite possessing a variety of problems, such as boundary wars and economic nationalism.
- Modern relations between India and China began in 1950, when India terminated formal ties with the Republic of China (Taiwan). It then recognized the People's Republic of China as a legitimate government in mainland China. Both the countries are two major regional powers in the Asia region.

Flower Processing Centre

- The Department of Horticulture of Karnataka will set up a flower processing center in cooperation with the Bangalore International Flower Auction (IFAB). The center will be set up to turn the unsold flowers into usable items.

Key Points

- The flower processing centre will process the flowers and convert them into value-added products like floral arts, natural dyes, incense sticks, floral papers, floral embedded works, flower petal powder for cosmetic usage and silica-stored flowers.
- This flower processing facility was needed because flower farmers are suffering with huge losses whenever there is market disruption.
- Thus, with the establishment of this facility, the farmers can learn the art of flower processing from the centre.

■ NOTE:

- Karnataka comprises rich diversity of flora and fauna. The total recorded forest area of the state is 38,720 km². It accounts for 20.19% of the total geographical area of State.
- Talacauvery and Kudremukh are two clusters of western ghats in Karnataka that find their place in the tentative list of World Heritage Sites of UNESCO.

National Urban Digital Mission

- The Central government launched the 'National Urban Digital Mission'. It was launched by the Union Housing & Urban Affairs Ministry and Ministry of Electronics & IT.

Key Points:

- This mission will institutionalise the citizen-centric and ecosystem-driven approach for the urban governance and service delivery in cities by the year 2022. It will also be providing these service deliveries in all cities and towns by 2024.
- Initiatives like Smart-Code, India Urban Data Exchange (IUDX), Smart Cities 2.0 website, and Geospatial Management Information System (GMIS) were also launched at this virtual event.

- "India Urban Data Exchange (IUDX)" initiative has been developed by the Smart Cities Mission in partnership with the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru.
- This mission will help in creating a shared digital infrastructure which in turn can be used to consolidate and cross-leverage the several digital initiatives of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs.

About India Urban Data Exchange (IUDX):

- It is an open-source software platform facilitating a secure and authenticated exchange of data across several data platforms, data producers, 3rd party applications and consumers. IUDX will provide full control to the data owners regarding the sharing of data. They could control as to what data needs to be exposed and to whom.
- Smart Cities Mission :** It is an urban renewal and retrofitting program that seeks to develop smart cities across India so as to make cities citizen friendly and sustainable. This mission is being implemented by the Union Ministry of Urban Development in association with the respective state governments. It initially included 100 cities that will be completed in between 2019 and 2023.

24th FEBRUARY 2021

Grey List of FATF

- The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) agreed to retain Pakistan on the Gray List until June 2021.
- This decision was made by the FATF in the light of the inability of the government to cooperate fully with the 27-point counter-terrorism action plan.

Key Facts:

- The FATF has agreed to keep Pakistan in the gray list and will stay under intensified supervision as significant shortcomings in the funding of terrorism have been found.
- While Pakistan has taken a range of steps, three significant points out of 27 action points need to be resolved.

- The FATF had also kept Pakistan into the grey list in October, 2020 and decided that FATF will continue to make it difficult for Pakistan to get aid from the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, International Monetary Fund, and European Union.

About UNSC resolution 1267:

- This resolution was adopted on 15 October 1999. In compliance with this resolution, the Council named Osama bin Laden and his associates as terrorists. The Council established a sanctions regime to protect persons and organizations affiliated with Al-Qaeda, Osama bin Laden or the Taliban.

e-Daakhil Portal

- The Ministry of Consumer Affairs agreed to merge the Traditional Service Centers (CSCs) with the E-Daakhil platform in order to make e-filing simpler for customers.

Key highlight:

- The e-Daakhil Consumer grievance resolution portal was introduced by the National Consumer Dispute Redressal Commission on 7 September 2020.
- This online dispute redressal portal is currently in service in 15 States and Union Territories.
- The e-daakhil platform empowers customers and their advocates to upload customer complaints online.
- It also makes it easy for males to pay the necessary fees online from anywhere in order to address their grievances. The site also allows the online review of complaints by consumer commissions in order to approve, deny or forward any case to the Commission concerned in order to proceed further.
- This portal has been developed under the Consumer Protection Act, 2019.

Consumer Protection Act, 2019:

- The bill was presented by Ram Vilas Paswan, Minister of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, in Lok Sabha in July 2019 and passed by Lok Sabha in July 2019.

- The Act repealed and amended the Consumer Rights Act of 1986. This Act came into force in July 2020. The Act emphasizes on giving the consumer more leverage to offer more accountability.

Vaccine Equality

- The Director-General of the World Health Organisation (WHO) commended India and the Prime Minister of India for sharing the vaccines of Covid-19 and for fostering "Vaccine Equality" around the world.
- The WHO Chief also hoped that other nations would follow the same course by administering vaccines fairly.

COVAX initiative:

- It is the "COVID-19 Global Access Vaccine" initiative launched by the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization of the WHO (GAVI).
- The initiative was introduced with the intention of promoting equal access for all countries to vaccines and avoiding "Vaccine Imperialism."
- Under this initiative, India had announced to supply ten Lakh doses to United Nations Health workers and one crore of vaccine doses to Africa in January 2021.

B.1.526: New contagious Covid-19 variant

- A recent extremely infectious strain of Covid-19, named B.1.526, is causing significant harm in New York City.

Key Points:

- Analysis reported on the Columbia University website suggests that the new variant of Covid-19 carries a highly dangerous mutation that could threaten the potency of the vaccine.
- The study noted that the highly contagious form was initially found in samples collected in November 2020.
- Cases of these new versions have been rising steadily in the city since December 2020.

Lineage P.1 or Brazilian Variant

- It is a strain of the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes the COVID-19 disease. This edition includes 17 distinct differences of amino acids. Of these, 10 are present in its spike protein, such as N501Y and E484K.
- This version was first found by four people in Japan on 6 January 2021 by the National Institute of Infectious Diseases (NIID).

25th FEBRUARY 2021

Report on Currency & Finance 2020-21

- A Report on Currency and Finance (RCF) by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) was released recently. It has recommended that the time span that was considered to measure whether monetary policy-setting panel has failed in achieving its objectives or not should be of four quarters rather than the current time period of three-quarter.

Key Findings

- The report further suggests that the provisions of the six-member Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) be carried out to the members in order to moderate the political impact at the time of the new appointments for a fixed period.
- The recommendations in the study have come after a time when the inflation rate has been consistently on the upper edge of the 6 per cent headline inflation target for many months.
- The expert also points out that the Monetary Policy Committee should clarify the lack of adequate field visits to the data during the lockdown in this respect.
- The study points out that the concept of MPC loss needs to be updated from the existing three-quarter horizon.
- According to the report, the failure can be redefined as inflation overshooting or inflation undershooting the upper and lower tolerance bands around the set target for a time span of four consecutive quarters.

Global Energy and Environment Leadership Award

- The Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, is set to win the "CERAWeek Global Energy and Environmental Leadership Award" at the annual International Energy Conference.

Key Highlights:

- Prime minister will also be delivering the keynote address at the CERAWeek Conference-2021.
- The CERAWeek Conference-2021 will be held virtually from March 1 to 5, 2021.
- The conference will be organised by IHS Markit.
- It is an annual international conference that brings together the energy industry leaders, experts, Policy makers, Government officials, leaders from the technology, energy technology innovators and financial & industrial communities.

■ NOTE:

IHS Markit is an American-British information provider. The organisation is based in London and it was established with the merger of HIS Inc. & Markit Ltd. in 2016. The organisation combines the information, analytics and expertise in order to provide solutions for government, business and finance.

NSO's GDP Forecast

- The National Statistical Office (NSO) recently published statistics on the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for the financial year 2021.

Key Facts:

- As per the NSO, the Indian economy will be expanded by 0.4% in the December quarter. Thus, with this, the economy will emerge from the recession which was induced by the covid-19 pandemic.
- The report also highlights that the recovery of the economy is expected to strengthen because the vaccination programme in India is progressing

smoothly. Because of this, the public has gained the confidence to shop, dine out and travel.

- It further highlights that the expansion in gross domestic product (GDP) was weaker than 0.6% as estimated by economists in the Bloomberg survey.

About National Statistical Office (NSO):

- NSO as an organization established on the recommendation of the Rangarajan Commission. The Office was set up to introduce and uphold statistical norms and to organize the statistical efforts of the central and state agencies in compliance with the National Statistical Commission (NSC).

ISRO's PSLV-C51/Amazonia-1 Mission

- The countdown for the launch of the PSLV-C 51 or Amazonia-1 mission of the Indian Space Research Organization began.

Key Highlights:

- PSLV-C51 is expected to be launched from the Satish Dhawan Space Center (SDSC) in Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh.
- It will be launched from the Space Center at 10:24 p.m. on 28 February 2021.
- This is ISRO's 53rd Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle Flight.
- In this launch, the PSLV-C51 rocket will carry Brazilian satellite Amazonia-1 as primary satellite.
- Along with the Brazilian Satellite, the ISRO Vehicle will also carry 19 co-passenger satellites.

About Amazonia-1

- Amazonia-1 is being submitted to the National Center for Space Research, Brazil. The spacecraft is the Earth's optical observation satellite.
- The satellite would work to provide the power of the current system. It will also share the remote sensing data so as to monitor the deforestation in the Amazon region of Brazil. Further, the satellite will provide analysis of diversified agriculture across Brazil.

26th FEBRUARY 2021

State of School Feeding Worldwide Report

- The United Nations World Food Programs (WFP) has issued a study entitled The Status of School Nutrition Worldwide.
- According to the study, the COVID-19 pandemic threats have reversed the attempts that have been made globally for a decade to provide healthy food to the world's most disadvantaged children.
- The report highlights that, one in two school children that would count as around 388 million children worldwide received the school meals when the pandemic was at its peak. This accounts for the highest number in history

UN World Food Programme

- WEP is a United Nations Food Assistance Division established in 1961. It is the world's leading humanitarian agency focusing on malnutrition and food security.
- The group is also the largest supplier of school meals. WEP is based in Rome and has branches in 80 countries.

NOTE:

The UN World Food Programme was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2020 for its efforts in providing food assistance in the areas of conflict.

Centre's New Guidelines on Social Media Regulation

- The centre notified Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules 2021 on February 25, 2021. The new guidelines are aimed at regulating social media and OTT platforms.

Key Highlights:

- The new Rules on digital media and OTT aim to empower ordinary users of social media, embodying a mechanism for redressal and timely resolution of their grievance.
- The proposed framework is progressive, liberal and contemporaneous and seeks to address peoples' varied concerns while removing any misapprehension about curbing creativity and freedom of speech and expression.
- The rules have been framed keeping in mind the difference between viewership in a theatre and television as compared to watching it on the Internet.
- The rules focus more on in house and self-regulation mechanisms whereby a robust grievance redressal mechanism has been provided while upholding journalistic and creative freedom.

Need of new rules:

- The government has notified the new rules on digital media and OTT with the aim of empowering the ordinary users regarding social media.
- With the new rules, the government wants to set up a mechanism for redressal and timely resolution of their grievance.
- The new rules are progressive, liberal and contemporaneous.
- It seeks to address varied concerns of people.

■ NOTE:

The new guidelines on social media were framed in accordance with the section 87 (2) of the Information Technology Act, 2000. These guidelines were released after having an elaborate consultation with the public as well as the stakeholders.

Standard Personal Accident Cover

- The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (IRDAI) introduced a basic personal injury cover called Saral Suraksha Bima. This coverage of the crash will be made mandatory by general and health insurers as of 1 April 2021.

About Saral Suraksha Bima

- This commodity has a guaranteed cumulative price of Rs 1 crore and a guaranteed minimum amount of Rs 2.5 lakh.
- Beyond this specified amount, the insurers are free to sell the amounts covered on their own. For this sum, the same name will be given if all terms and conditions are the same.
- The product also comprises a basic cover for which the entire sum assured will be paid by the insurance company after the death of the insured person because of injury sustained in the accident. In such cases, death occurs within 12 months from the date of accident.
- In cases of permanent total disablement, similar benefits will be paid by insurance firms.

Other Benefits

- Under the scheme, hospitalization costs will be paid up to a cap of 10% of the basic covered number.
- A one-time tuition allowance of 10% of the basic value of the insured would also be payable to minor children of the insured. In order to make advantage of the incentives, children should take an education course and should not be above the age of 25.
- Further, the sum insured will be increased by 5 per cent every year for each of the claim-free policy year. In such cases, Policy is required to be renewed without break.

27th FEBRUARY 2021

World's largest stadium in Gujarat

- The President of India has inaugurated the world's largest Stadium at Motera, in Gujarat.

Key Facts

- The Motera stadium was later renamed as the Narendra Modi Stadium.
- This stadium has surpassed the Melbourne Cricket Ground and became the largest stadium in the world.

- This stadium is going to make history by hosting the second home pink-ball test match on February 24 between India and England.
- It comprises four dressing rooms which is required nowadays for hosting twenty-twenty matches back-to-back. The stadium was built over 63 acres.

Augmented Reality Head Mounted Display (ARHMD) System

- The Indian Army is in the process of acquiring niche technologies by acquiring a 556 Virtual Reality Head Mounted Display (ARHMD) device. The Army is going to buy it under Make-II Category.

Key Highlights:

- The ARHMD System is seen as a capability enhancement for the Land Based Air Defence Weapon Systems.
- The land-based air defence weapon systems include ZU 23mm 2B AD Gun System and the IGLA shoulder fired Infra-Red Homing Air Defence Missile System. These systems will provide operators with radar and Thermal Imaging (TI) sight outputs.
- The proposed system seeks to enhance engagement capability during night.
- It will also enhance the conditions of inclement weather.

Make-II Projects

- In the defense procurement procedure, the provision of the 'Make' segment of capital acquisition is a core pillar of the vision of the 'Make in India' initiative.
- This category encourages domestic technologies through the design and production of the necessary defense equipment, goods or programs from both the public and private sectors.
- Make-II- Projects involve the prototype development of equipment, system or platform. It also involves the upgradation of the equipment or system. For the development of the prototype, no Government funding is provided.

President's Rule in Puducherry

- The Cabinet of the Union has accepted a plan to impose the Constitution of the President in Puducherry. This initiative was accepted days after the Congress-led government in the territories of the Union lost power after a vote of confidence.

Key Highlights:

- This decision was taken because no party claimed to form a government in Puducherry after the resignation of the Chief Minister.
- Following his resignation, the Lieutenant General recommended the Law of the President in Puducherry, which was accepted by the Cabinet of the Union.
- The model code of conduct will also come into effect after the Election Commission announced the dates for elections.

About President's Rule

- The law of the President in India is to suspend the constitution of the State and to enforce the rule of the Government of the Union. The law of the President shall be imposed in compliance with Article 356 of the Constitution.
- It is enforced when the administration of the State is unable to operate in compliance with the rules of the Constitution. Following this, the centrally designated governor shall exercise the executive power.
- The governor can also appoint other administrators to assist them. Under the President's rule, the council of ministers is dissolved and the office of chief minister is vacated.

28th FEBRUARY 2021

Loneliness Minister to Check Suicide Rate

- Japan has named Japan's first ever Minister of Loneliness in the light of rising suicide rates in Japan.
- Suicide occurrences in Japan have risen for the first time in 11 years in the latest pandemic scenario of COVID-19.

- Japan appointed the United Kingdom Minister of Solitude, who became the first nation in the world to create a comparable role in the country in 2018.

Suicide in Japan

- Suicide is perceived to be a significant societal concern in Japan. The nation recorded the seventh highest suicide rate in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development in 2017.
- During the 1997 Asian financial crisis, suicide rates rose by 34.7%. After that, the figures were at their highest in 2003 and the rates were falling.

International Anti-corruption

Champions Award

- Anjali Bhardwaj, an Indian social activist focusing on issues of openness and responsibility, has been nominated for the "United States World Anti-Corruption Champions Prize."
- The new International Anti-Corruption Champions Award has been unveiled to honor people who have fought diligently toward transparency and injustice in order to ensure responsibility in their own nations.

About Anjali Bhardwaj

- She's a 48-year-old feminist who is also the founder of 'Satark Nagrik Sangathan (SNS).'
- SNS is a citizens' association that advocates openness and integrity of government and facilitates the active involvement of citizens.
- She has also worked as an influential member of the Right to Knowledge Movement in India.

Whistleblower Protection Act, 2014

- The act shall contain a provision for reception of reports relating to wrongdoing or wilful abuse of power or influence by any civil official.
- It further allows for the process to investigate or trigger investigation into such allegations. In addition, this Act provides for the provision of protections for an individual who makes a case about victimization.

First Paperless Budget

- The Chief Minister of Rajasthan, Ashok Gehlot, led the Congress Administration, delivered its third state budget and first paperless budget to the State Assembly on 24 February 2021.

Rajasthan Legislative Assembly

- The Rajasthan State Legislature is the unicameral legislature. This assembly is meeting at the Vidhan Bhavan in Jaipur.
- The Members of the State Legislative Assembly are directly elected by the people. They shall be elected for a term of five years. There are actually 200 members of the National Assembly.

Unicameral Legislature

- Unicameral Legislature means the legislature which comprises a single legislative or parliamentary chamber or assembly.
- Almost half of the independent nations of the world are unicameral. However, the People's Republic of China sits in between having a senate and a formal advisory body.

New Alpine Plant Species

- A group of scientists from three institutes have discovered a new species of alpine plant in the Tawang district of Arunachal Pradesh.

About the New Alpine Plant Species

- The latest plant species belongs to the Himalayan sunflower family.
- It was called Cremanthodium indicum.
- This plant species will typically bloom from July to August.
- It is native to the Penga-Teng Tso Lake district of Tawang.
- As per the IUCN Guideline, this alpine plant species has been listed as critically endangered.

■ NOTE:

Alpine climate is a typical weather for the regions that occurs above the treeline. It is also called the mountain climate or highland climate.